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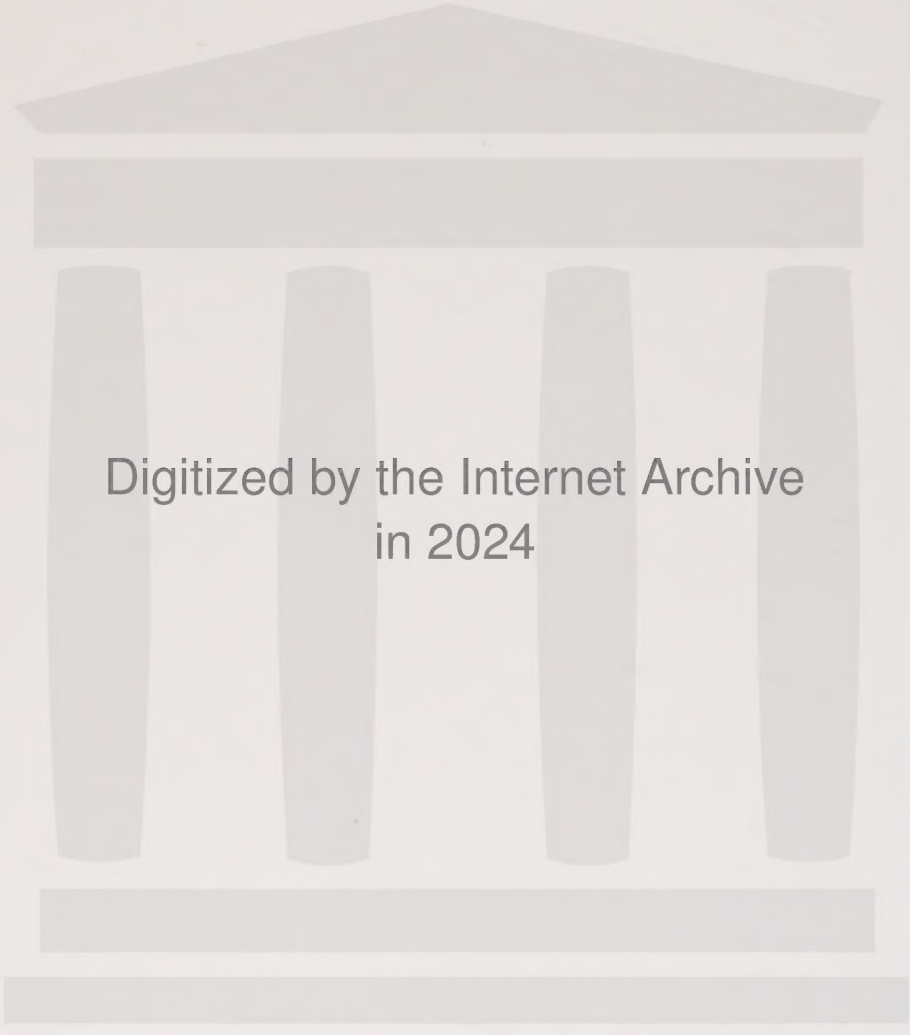
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MEMOIRS

FOR THE

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR OF LA VENDÉE.

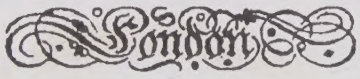
IN WHICH THE PRINCIPAL EVENTS OF THAT WAR ARE ACCURATELY RELATED, FROM ITS ORIGIN, UNTIL THE 13TH FLORÉAL, OF THE SECOND YEAR OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

LOUIS-MARIE TURREAU,

COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE WESTERN ARMY.



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1796.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE present Work has been compleated these six months. The publication has been deferred, because I wished to present to the Public in a more ample manner the Principal Events of the War in la Vendée. The great alteration in my health, which hindered me from too serious an application, and the deprivation of my papers which I expected would be restored to me every day, has at length forced me to abandon this project, and although these Memoirs offer no great interest with regard to their style, yet they merit great attention on account of the importance of the subject.

TURREAU.

PREFACE.

A Complete History of the War of la Vendée, would be, perhaps, in our political situation, a work the most interesting and the most useful that could be presented to the French Nation. Such an enterprise was, without doubt, above my capacity; however, listening to my

zeal and attachment for the public welfare, and besides disengaged from the inquietudes as well as the illusions of self-love, I should have dedicated myself wholly to the composition of that work, had I not been deprived of the greatest part of the materials necessary for its completion.

However imperfect in every point of view, this may be which I now offer to the public, yet I think it will not be without utility; and, if some regard is due to the misfortunes, and to the purity and intentions of a man, whose love for his country and truth guides his pen, I shall obtain, easily, the indulgence of all friends to their country; I care little for the judgment and opinion of others.

This historical essay, solely intended to fix the attention on a War which is not yet known, will not contain any thing relative to the justification of the conduct I held when I had the command of the forces of the West; a justification which the discernment and justice of those who know the

secret of my political and military life, ought to spare me.

But, when it will be necessary to defend myself, I shall do it with that superiority of means which an upright man receives from a frank and open conduct, and the full conviction of his innocence. I shall answer by positive facts, by interesting proofs, to all the false, and indeed frequently absurd, imputations, which have been made against me; nor shall I find much trouble in destroying such a heap of vague accusations and charges without proof, entertained and propagated by malevolence, and which alone personal hatred has raised against me.

I shall banish from my defence every thing that may satisfy resentment, provoked continually against me by the production of falsehood and the spirit of party. I shall write, I shall speak without animosity, without ill humour, and without partiality or private hatred. Private affairs, as well as general interests, ought to be discussed

cussed in the absence of the passions; neither should misfortune, nor even injustice, be pleaded as sufficient motives for introducing bitterness or passion into one's speeches or writings.

I am but little affected at the outrages of calumny, because, in reflecting within myself, in running over the history of my life, I perceive nothing but actions which honour it. It is sufficient for me to be without reproach, and to have foreseen for some time the blow which is now aimed at me, to render me indifferent on the fate reserved for me. Exempt from remorse, as well as fear, which belong only to the guilty or to cowards, I wait with security the term of my afflictions; and when, after having been the victim of the error of government, I shall be again that of my judges, shall I not leave to my friends the means of rescuing my memory from opprobrium and ignominy?—But let us return to my work. It may be read with confidence; truth and impartiality the most severe have presided over and dictated its contents.

The greatest part of the details on the causes of the prosperity and decline of the Vendeans, were transmitted to me by M. d'Elbée, their Generalissimo, who became my prisoner at the reduction of the island of Noirmoutier.

TURREAU.

MEMOIRS

FOR THE

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR OF LA VENDÉE.

PART THE FIRST.

IN order to discover the origin of the War of la Vendée, we must go back to the beginning of the Revolution. This assertion, however astonishing or bold it may appear to many, is not the less just, and I could bring evident proofs of it, if, in order to deduce the true causes of this war, I were not obliged to enter into particulars ill suited to the present work. However, it

is erroneous to attribute the general and spontaneous revolt of the inhabitants of Lower Poitou to the raising of three hundred thousand men : this is but an incidental cause to the birth and existence of a party, which could never have been so successful, nor have assumed all the qualities of an invincible power, without the concurrence of infinite resources, plans, and means, long since prepared.

Those who are acquainted with the country, and have observed the conduct of the Priests and Nobles since the commencement of the Revolution, the steps taken by the constituted authorities, and the moral disposition of the inhabitants, will readily discover, in interior events, the original causes of the revolt, and the first elements of which this political volcano is composed, which, by its sudden and terrible explosion, has more or less shaken, in proportion to their distance, all the Western Departments.

The intrepid inhabitants of le Bocage and le Loroux (1,) who have obtained so many decisive

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(1) Le Bocage is a part of Lower Poitou, now divided into several districts belonging to the department of la Vendée. Le Loroux is that part of the left bank of the Loire, immediately bordering the river, and which is comprised, according to the new division, within the departments of the Loire Inférieure and the Mayenne and Loire.

advan-

advantages when left to their own strength, were not to have acted by themselves, if the plan of their chiefs had been fully executed; for the party which has desolated the left banks of the Loire, was only a branch of that belonging to the celebrated Laroyerie, whose extensive conspiracy had taken root in many parts of the Republic, even in the departments lying at the greatest distance from its center (2): and if, whilst the left bank was constantly the theatre of the most bloody battles, and that each day was signalized by a fresh victory on the part of the Vendeans, there had been more unison and regularity in the partial movements made on the right bank; or, rather, if the rebels of that party had joined the others, and had simultaneously directed and continued their incursions towards the South, we may judge what terrible effects would have resulted from the junction of these parties, from the coincidence of their movements, then operating in a body, and upon points very near each other, and how many dangers *a handful of banditti*, (3) as they are called, might have threatened the Republic with.

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(2) It is well known that the center of this conspiracy was in Brittany.

(3) It has been often said during the war, "it is astonishing that *a handful of banditti* should resist so long."

However, without enlarging further upon the causes of the war of la Vendée, concerning which I have data sufficiently positive to prove all that I shall advance (causes which I shall develop in another work); without examining here what were the ramifications and extent of this horrid conspiracy against liberty, let us see what degree of consistency and prosperity the Royalist and Catholic party has attained (4); what great strength and means this truly colossal power has all at once exhibited, still less astonishing by its successes than by the obstinacy and continuance of its resistance.

It is wrong to comprehend all the rebels, who have successively disturbed most of the Western departments, under the general term of Chouans or Vendeans. The rebels beyond the Loire must not be confounded with those on the right bank, nor the rebels of Morbihan with the Vendeans, or the banditti of the Marais, because the events, the locality, and the political existence of the insurgents have assigned very different characters to these wars.

The inhabitants of twenty or five and twenty villages within the districts of Ploërmel and Pon-

(4) The chief army of the Vendeans called itself the *Catholic and Royal Army*.

tivy,

tivy, led on by fanatic Priests, assembled in remote churches, or in the woods, to hear mass. The appearance of two or three companies of volunteers sufficed to disperse them: those were the rebels of Morbihan (5).

Three brothers called *Chouans*, formed meetings in the environs of Laval and la Gravelle. The places where they committed their robberies, and the information that has been obtained, leads us to suppose that the original profession of these chiefs was that of smuggling; this is the origin of the rebels called *Chouans*. Originally few in number these banditti seldom went far from the forests of le Pertre and la Guerche, their usual places of resort.

But they were soon reinforced by some rebels from the departments of Calvados, la Manche,

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(5) We must not thence infer that we ought to remain tranquil upon the situation of Brittany. There have been disturbances in the Morbihan for a long time past. They get suppressed, but break out again. Hitherto government does not appear to have attended so seriously to the rebels of Brittany as to the Chouans and Vendeans. Nevertheless they should take care; for if other means are not employed than those already used to restore peace to that unhappy country, which fanaticism has disturbed ever since the beginning of the Revolution, it may become a second la Vendée. Above all things, it is necessary to prevent the Chouans from penetrating there. I have reason to think that it is the plan of their chiefs to do so.

and

and Brittany; by the broken remains of a body of the army, escaped from la Vendée, under the command of the Prince de Talmont, after the battle of Chollet, and totally routed in that of Savenay, by some scattered mal-contents in the vicinity of Château-Gontier, Sablé, &c. where they had previously excited commotions, and finally by a considerable number of young men who had withdrawn themselves from the first requisition.

The Chouans, become more numerous, soon had less obscure chiefs, and amongst those who commanded them after the death of the Prince de Talmont (6), have been observed a Chevalier de Puisaye (7), a Comte de Boulainvilliers, &c. &c.

The country infested by the Chouans is very extensive, and forms nearly a square; of which Nantes, Angers, Mayenne, and Rennes, are the angles. They sometimes shew themselves upon the roads of Fougères, and from Dol to Rennes. Their meetings in general consist of from thirty

(6) He commanded them but a short time after the defeat of Savenay. He was soon arrested near Erné, tried at Rennes, and executed at Laval

(7) Formerly Adjutant General, attached to General Wimpffen

to

to forty men (8), and they seldom dare make resistance against the Republican troops of equal force (9).

Le Marais is that part of Lower Poitou adjacent to the sea. It is a flat and very open country, and the passes are impracticable during winter, and very difficult in other seasons.—It is intersected at all points of its circumference by canals, or salt marshes, a species of natural fortification which renders any attack against it very dangerous, and consequently is favorable for defence, particularly for the inhabitants. Few carriage roads are to be met with, the greatest part are bye-ways or raised paths, and made between two canals. These canals are in

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(8) Their chiefs have ordered them to continue thus divided, until *more favourable* circumstances will admit of their joining their brethren in la Vendée.

(9) In perusing this work, the reader must not recur to the time when I wrote it, but to the time when I commanded the Western army, that is to say, from the 1st Nivôse to the 4th Floréal, in the second year. I am ignorant of the events which have since occurred, and whether the state of things is changed. At that time the banditti had but very little firmness. I was so fortunate, when I commanded in the West, as to prevent them joining the Vendeans. They were never in a situation at that time to undertake any operation in a body. The roads from Nantes, Vannes, and Angers, were free and secure.

general

general from thirty to forty feet wide, from the upper extremity of one bank to the other. The banditti carrying his musket in a bandoleer, leans upon a long pole, and leaps from one bank to the other with amazing facility. If the presence of the enemy will not admit of his performing this exercise, without exposing himself to his fire, he throws himself into his *niole* (10), and crosses the canal with very great rapidity, being always sufficiently shut up to hide himself from the sight of his pursuers. He soon appears again, fires at you, and disappears in an instant, very often before you have time to answer his fire. The republican soldier, to whom this mode of fighting is unknown, is obliged to be continually upon his guard, to march along the shores of the canals, and to follow slowly their circuitous track, supporting at the same time frequent skirmishes: thus it costs him several hours to traverse over a space which the banditti most commonly accomplishes in a few minutes (11).

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(10) A kind of small boat, very flat and very light.

(11) After you have surmounted all these obstacles, and arrived at the plain, after having followed all the zig-zags formed by the canals which surround it, the enemy present themselves in all parts; they seem to rise out of the land and water. Notwithstanding which we must at any rate take post

The inhabitants of le Marais formed a division of the army of Charette, and followed it very regularly in its expeditions, at the time it occupied all the neighbouring points of their country; such as Challans, Machecoul, &c. and afterwards the isles of Bouin and Noirmoutier. But after it had been driven from all these posts, and forced to abandon successively all the frontier boroughs and towns of le Marais and le Bocage, as Legé, Palluau, Aizenay, Baulieu (12), &c. &c. then the banditti of le Marais remained at home and confined themselves to a defensive war, for which nature seems to have formed their country. This war was the more dangerous as the situation of le Marais (13) placed the inhabitants in a state to receive succours from abroad, or to facilitate and protect the debarkation of such as they wish to procure for the rebels of la Vendée.—The coasts in those parts of the Western Departments being extremely flat and easy of access by sea, (14)

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post there, and support ourselves at it, for one may judge of the dangers of a retreat in this country by the difficulties of penetrating it

(12) I request the reader to follow me with the map

(13) According to the new division a part of le Marais is in the district of les Sables, and the other in that of Challans, in the Department of la Vendée

(14) Although shoals may be found along these coasts, they are less difficult of access than if they were steep,

every thing was to be dreaded from the consequences which might ensue from the communications and enterprizes of domestic and external enemies; and we may judge of the perilous situation of the republican troops destined for the defence of these coasts, in case of a combined attack from both, as they would have found themselves between two fires, and their local disposition necessarily preventing them from being but weakly and slowly supported (15).

But the object would have been but imperfectly accomplished, if, in order to attack and clear this den of banditti, the operations had been confined to the defence of the coasts against the invasion of foreigners. It was necessary to cut off the communication with Charette, and prevent him from giving or receiving assistance from the banditti of le Marais. Thus, and in this respect only, can the war of le Marais, that of the Chouans, and even that of Morbihan (16),

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particularly if the inhabitants favour the descent of the enemy.

(15) I have stated the reasons in describing the country.

(16) What I here advance does not cancel what I have said above concerning the want of stability of the inhabitants of Morbihan This war is not yet serious; but it will become so if not guarded against. The public spirit is detestable in Brittany. The Priests and Nobles which infect it, and who certainly do not like the Republic, have long sought to excite a general insurrection.

be

be compared to that of la Vendée. In whatever situations the republican troops may be placed, whatever direction may be given to their active columns, they are every where surrounded by enemies.

From what I have said of the banditti of le Marais we may be able to judge of those on the right bank of the Loire (the Chouans), and the rebels of Morbihan, of the necessity of separating (17) these wars in order to terminate them; of cutting off all communication and connection between the different parties, whose greatest efforts tend to operate a junction between them; of preventing or destroying every plan which they might be able to concert; and finally to keep them insulated, in order to destroy them. We shall be convinced of this when we are acquainted with the war of la Vendée. And if we have attained this end, if we have prevented the union of these different parties of rebels, we must not dissemble that we are less indebted to our efforts and success for it, than to local circumstances, the ambition and inability of the chiefs of the banditti, and above all to that rivalry which has continually divided them.

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(17) This was, as will be seen, the first object of my plan.

Let us now speak of the Vendeans; let us speak of those truly extraordinary men, whose political exiſtence, whose rapid and extraordinary successes, and above all their unheard of ferocity, will form an epoch in the republican æra; of those Vendeans who want only humanity and another cause to support, to unite every heroic quality.

A mode of fighting hitherto unknown, and perhaps inimitable if it be really practicable in that country alone, and peculiar to the genius of its inhabitants; an inviolable attachment to their party; an unlimited confidence in their chiefs; such fidelity in their promises as may supply the want of discipline; an invincible courage which is proof against every kind of danger, fatigue, and want; these are what make the Vendeans formidable enemies, and which ought to place them in history in the first rank of military people. Finally, the Vendeans are Frenchmen animated with the double fanaticism of Religion and Royalty, who have for a long while fixed victory on their side, and who could not have been conquered but by Frenchmen.

To enter into a long account of the topography of Poitou, and the ancient and modern manners of the inhabitants, belongs only to a work of very great extent; and as, in this historical and very concise

concise essay, I consider la Vendée only in a military point of view, and that my only object is to publish the events which have occurred during the course of this singular war, concerning which nothing has yet been written that is either supportable or true, I shall refer such of my readers as wish to know what were the customs, the character, and the prejudices of the ancient Poictevins, to the history of their country and the civil wars which have desolated France, and particularly to a work entitled *Annales d'Acquitaine.* They will find even in the nature of the country, in the ignorance, the habits, the superstition of the people, the cause of their evils, and the origin of the religious and party wars, of which Poitou has ever been the theatre and cradle.

Le Bocage and le Loroux form the country which may be called la Vendée, as it is that in which the war has been constantly the most vigorous and bloody. They are two great cantons, one of which (le Bocage) formed part of Poitou, and the other a part of Anjou and Brittany. They are now divided, according to the new division, into the Departments of la Vendée, les Deux Sèvres, la Loire Inférieure, and Mayenne and Loire. It is the most fertile country belonging to the Republic; it was also the most populous before the horrors of war and the calamitous dominion

minion of the rebels had driven away the patriots, and a resolution (18) of the representatives of the people on mission in the Western Departments had compelled such of the inhabitants as wished to remain, to quit that perfidious country, on pretence of a neutrality dangerous to them and their troops, and which always turned to the advantage of the rebels (19).

But in order to be enabled to know the true theatre of the war, the following is the territory which they occupied during their prosperity: for their Northern boundaries, they had the Loire; to the West, the sea; to the South, Fontenay, Luçon, les Sables, and Niort; and to the East, Parthenay, Thouars, and Doué (20.)

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(18) It is dated the 2d Ventôse; and is in substance, "that the inhabitants of la Vendée shall quit the country, "otherwise they shall be considered as making a common "cause with the rebels, and shall be treated as such." I shall observe, that without this resolution, and other steps taken by these representatives, in order to cut off all communication between the banditti and their secret accomplices, disseminated throughout la Vendée and the neighbouring towns, I saw no bounds to the contagion, nor end of the war.

(19) I shall state the reasons.

(20) The banditti have sometimes gone beyond these bounds. They have taken Fontenay, Thouars, Doué, Saumur,

The locality of le Bocage is a perfect contrast to that of la Marais. Le Bocage (21) is a country very much intersected, although there are no large rivers; very uneven, although there are no mountains; and very woody, although there are but few forests, and the woods, which are numerous, are but of a moderate extent. It is very uneven, and much intersected by reason of many little hills, valleys, ravines, small rivers, almost always fordable, even rivulets which one may often pass over dry-shod, but which the least rain transforms into torrents. It is much intersected, because all the estates are divided into small inclosures or fields (22) surrounded with ditches. It is very woody, because the fields are inclosed with strong hedges planted on the banks

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mur, and Angers; but having miscarried before Nantes, they repassed the Loire, and did not return to the right bank till after the affair of Chollet.

(21) It is the same with le Loroux, rather less woody, however, than le Bocage, in that part which is nearest the bank of the Loire.

(22) These fields are commonly not more than fifty or sixty perches in extent, and are frequently surrounded by ditches. It is principally owing to this subdivision of land into small fields, and to the ditches and drains which surround and intersect them, that the ground is so extremely fertile, which otherwise would be exceedingly watery.

of

of the ditches, sometimes with trees, disposed in such a manner that they have the effects of pallisades round a fortification.

What still contributes to render this country very woody is, that, the soil being very rich and fertile, shrubs, heath, thorns, broom, and in general all wild and spontaneous productions, as well as those obtained by industry, are of an immense size and strength.

Such a country will not admit of good roads (23); in fact, they are very bad in la Vendée. The convoys can scarcely travel three leagues during the whole day; and, for conveyance, it is necessary to make use of oxen, and the carts of the country, which are not of the usual breadth. The roads (24) are not wider than these carts. Spaces or cross roads where carriages can turn are

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(23) There are only two great roads in la Vendée; that from Nantes to Saumur by Chollet, and that from Nantes to la Rochelle by Montaigu, Saint Fulgent, &c. These great roads, which can only be followed by chance, are not more favorable for military operations than the cross roads. They only admit of greater order in marching. They are flanked by wide and deep ditches, their banks are obstructed by hedges, trees, bushes, &c; and it is generally upon the borders of these great roads that the enemy prepare their ambuscades, and plan their attacks.

(24) They are sometimes sunk ten or twelve feet below the surface of the earth.

seldom

seldom to be found; and, when the escort of a convoy is defeated, it becomes infallibly a prey to the banditti. If you were able previously to make a disposition for a retreat, it would necessarily be so slow that it could not be saved (25).

Thus la Vendée, that asylum of robbery and crimes, is like an extensive fortress, where the agents of royalism and aristocracy can concert their plots and meditate their horrid projects in security; and nature misled, seems there to have exerted all her power to protect the guilty resistance and the fatal independence of the domestic enemies of the Republic.

It is doubtless very difficult to carry on a war in a country like that of which I have just drawn a hasty description. In a country which opposes every thing to an attack, and presents so many resources for defence, how is a column to be led on and its movements regulated? how is order

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(25) We may thence infer, that a general acquainted with la Vendée ought not only to decline taking artillery with him, but also all equipage belonging to his columns, medical staff, camping effects, &c. An army desirous of penetrating into la Vendée wants only soldiers and pioneers. Every thing called *impedimenta* should be suppressed, if one is desirous of not suffering a defeat. A general officer in this country ought, as much as possible, to assimilate his mode of carrying on the war with that of the enemy.

and union to be preserved in its marches; manœuvres, signals, in forming the line, dispositions for an attack or a retreat, to be executed? How can the artillery and cavalry have fair play, and all that action which is congenial to these two arms, in the midst of obstacles by which the haunts of la Vendée are protected? How can a line of battle be instantly formed (26), the distances measured with the eye, the advantages and disadvantages of a forced position hastily taken be calculated, that of the enemy known, their projects foreseen, their position understood by a quick perception, like that occupied by your army, when frequent undulations of land, hedges, trees, and bushes, which obstruct the surface, will not admit of your seeing fifty paces around you? How can you take advantage of fortunate occurrences, or speedily remedy contrary events? or observe, or at least be soon enough informed of, any check or partial event that may have taken place during a battle, when you are often longer in receiving a report, or in sending an

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(26) Against rebels you can never unite in order of battle. You know not at what point you shall engage; whether you shall be attacked in front, in flank, or in the rear, or what dispositions the ground will allow you to make.

order

order from one end of the line to the other, than is required to decide the fate of a battle?

The banditti, favoured by every natural advantage, have a peculiar tactic, which they know perfectly how to apply to their position and local circumstances. Confident in the superiority which their mode of attack gives them, they never suffer themselves to be anticipated; they never engage but when and where they please. Their dexterity in the use of fire-arms is such, that no people we are acquainted with, however warlike or well skilled in manœuvring, can make such good use of a gun as the huntsman of le Loroux, and the poacher of le Bocage. Their attack is a dreadful, sudden, and almost unforeseen irruption, because it is very difficult in la Vendée to reconnoitre well, to get good information, and, consequently, to guard against a surprise. Their order of battle is in the form of a crescent, and their wings, thus directed *en fleches*, are composed of their best marksmen, soldiers who never fire without taking aim, and who seldom miss a mark placed at a common distance. You are routed, before you have had time to look about you, by a heavy discharge, which surpasses that of our ordonnances, the effects of which cannot be compared with theirs. They wait not for the word of command to fire, they are unacquainted

with batallion, rank, and platoon firing; and yet that which you experience from them is well directed, well supported, and more destructive than yours. If you resist their violent attacks, the rebels seldom dispute the victory with you; but little advantage can be derived from it, as they retreat so precipitately that it is difficult to come up with them, the country scarcely ever admitting of the use of cavalry. They disperse, escape from you through fields, hedges, woods, and bushes, knowing all the bye-roads, secret escapes, straits, and defiles; and being acquainted with all obstacles which could obstruct their flight, and the means of avoiding them. If you are obliged to give way to their attacks, you find as much difficulty in retreating, as they easily escape when defeated. When conquerors, they completely rout you, and cut you off in all parts; they pursue you with an inconceivable fury, animosity, and swiftness. They run in an attack and in a victory as they do upon a defeat; but they charge whilst marching, even in running, and the vivacity and justnesss of their musketry loses nothing by this constant state of mobility. In general, this war has so many singularities, that it must be pursued a long time before one can be well acquainted with it; and every well informed general officer, who has made ten campaigns

paigns upon the frontiers, will find it very difficult to act with success on his arrival in la Vendée. I call to witness all the general officers who, after having served upon the frontiers, have been employed in this hideous la Vendée, to say, whether they had an idea of this war before they entered into it; whether the Prussians, the Austrians, regular troops inured to the discipline of a Nassau and a Frederick, are so dreadful in battle, have so much address, cunning, and audacity, as the ferocious and intrepid marksmen of le Bocage and le Loroux (27); whether it is possible there can be a war more cruel, more fatiguing for military men of every rank, or more bloody than this; also, whether it does not destroy order, discipline, and subordination, in an army, and whether the soldier, soon enervated, depraved in this infamous country, the pestiferous air of which seems to corrupt even the moral complexions of individuals, whether the soldier, disgusted and discouraged with this war, and whose opinion of it seems to have alienated his glory (28), loses not

(27) I affirm, that every thing I have said concerning their method of fighting, however extraordinary it may appear, is strictly true.

(28) Ought not the Republicans who have been engaged in the war of la Vendée, to partake of the glory which appears to be exclusively reserved for their brethren in arms employed

that energy, that firmness, that invincible courage, which has so frequently caused him to triumph over the English and Austrian slaves; in fine, whether they would not prefer making a six months campaign upon the frontiers than one in la Vendée.

I think I have said enough to prove that the chief obstacles to all military enterprises in la Vendée arise from locality. The impossibility of securing a correspondence with the interior parts, and avoiding the delays it meets with; of keeping up communications; of sufficiently covering your posts, when the enemy is in all parts and surrounding you on every side; of establishing and guarding against their invasion, the depôts, the formation of which is necessitated by the distance from the magazines, and the slowness of the convoys; the difficulty, and above all the danger, of transporting warlike stores and provisions in a country where the roads are im-

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employed on the frontiers? Upwards of two hundred battles which have been fought on both sides of the Loire since the commencement of the war, prove that it was sufficiently severe, sufficiently important, to attach some merit to those who carried it on. It appears, however, that it has been meant to cast some disgrace upon the military who have served in la Vendée. I could wish their detractors might be sent to make a campaign there.

passable,

passable, where every thing is in ambush, where a column of 2000 men is necessary to escort a waggon laden with provisions or cartridges: (the enemy particularly confining themselves to attacking parties and escorts.) (29) These are what defeat your means and incessantly shackle your operations. Where is the general officer who, having formed a plan, can answer for its execution, or exactly follow it, in a war where every thing is irregular and dependant upon circumstances; where the reports are always uncertain and treacherous, because your spies are either timid or traitors; where the events of the day destroy or counteract the measures which the preceding one seemed to require; where all application of the principles of the plan to the local situations become useless or dangerous? In a country where the enemy is in all parts, and every

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(29) This ought to be particularly applied to the time when the war was to be carried on in the woody country, in the heart of la Vendée. Then the rebels, having lost some of their political stability, no longer shewed themselves in the immense plains which surround them. Shut up again in their dark retreats, they confined themselves to surprising the troops that endeavoured to penetrate there, and the posts which had so imprudently been kept up in the midst of the rebellious country. Moreover their method of attacking and fighting has always been the same.

where ſtrong where you are weak; free from every surprise, who are even invisible, when you march at the head of a strong and well regulated column? If your column ceases for a moment to be on its guard, and its order and union be broken, the enemy, soon collected, form themselves again into a body, attack you with fury, and make you repent the least negligence you may have been guilty of in your march. Every thing is in favour of the rebels in a country which they occupy, and every thing against the Republicans. Moreover, the former being well received, find provisions and resources of every kind, whilst the latter are obliged to carry every thing with them. If any soldiers should stray from the army and fall into the hands of the banditti, they are torn to pieces, tortured to death by degrees, or burnt by a slow fire; and when any stragglers stop at their houses, they only relieve them in order to retain them and put them to death by tortures. A thousand instances would prove, if necessary, what I here assert.

But a general officer who commands a body of troops in la Vendée, after he has led them on in a military manner, directed well his march, avoided the enemy's ambuscades, resisted all their attacks, or has attacked them himself with success,

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he has done nothing: he must find a position to spend the night, and give repose to his army; and such positions are not common in la Vendée, or rather there are no real military positions. The general must establish himself in such manner as to be able to take speedy measures, on whatever side he may be attacked; and he must not depend too much upon his advanced posts, which are always insufficient in this country, however well they may be formed, to guard against a surprise. You are very seldom attacked in front: the enemy usually fall upon your flank and rear. They even often direct their attacks upon you at every point at once; and I repeat it, they are sudden, violent, and accompanied with hideous cries and howlings.

Above all things the general should be cautious not to canton (30) his troops, or halt in any

(30) A general officer who, after having carried on a regular war upon the banks of the Moselle and the Scheldt, is employed in la Vendée, ought to become a noviciate for two or three months, in order to make himself acquainted with the locality and method of waging war in this country; if not, he will learn at his own expence. This is not without example.

I found, on my arrival in la Vendée (I was then commander of a brigade), a general officer commanding a division of the army, and whom I had seen command a considerable advanced guard upon the frontiers with ability. Without

 considering

towns, boroughs, or villages situated in the interior part of the country. (31) It is impossible to make a victorious resistance there. They are cut throat places, where one runs the risk of being surprised, or surrounded by the enemy; strong hedges, goss bushes, and sometimes woods, hide all the avenues. In other respects, the perfidious designs of the inhabitants render the stay of the troops so dangerous, that the obstinacy of some generals in leaving them there has occasioned us twenty defeats, and cost us thirty thousand men.

The rebels derived great advantages from the amicable dispositions of the inhabitants that remained in la Vendée. Too weak to take up arms

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considering the nature of the ground, he formed his regular dispositions, march, and order of battle, as he would have done in the plains of Belgium He took with him a numerous artillery, camp equipage, baggage, and immense train, his advanced guard was always at a great distance from the main body of the army, &c &c However, some fortunate events at first procured him success, but which was followed three days after by a dreadful disaster; and his defeat surprised me much less than his victory

(31) The evil disposition of the inhabitants was no doubt a sufficient reason for abandoning all the posts situated in the centre of la Vendée; but the local inconveniences alone made me give them up, even after the resolution of the 2d Ventôse.

with

with them they no less secretly favoured their cause: they acted as their spies: the women, and even the children, were faithful and intelligent agents, who minutely informed the rebel chiefs of the slightest movements made by the republican army. Our generals were desirous also of having spies belonging to the country; they have always been betrayed or badly served by them; and they have never been able to organize a plan in the Western army for obtaining information by spies. It was after they had discovered the certainty of these facts, it was after having been convinced that the greateft part of the inhabitants of la Vendée, without taking up arms, were not less the accomplices, the secret partizans of the rebels, that the representatives of the people with that army took the resolution before mentioned. (32)

We have just seen what were the means, the resources, the advantages, which la Vendée afforded the rebels: we shall now prove that they also derived some from the neighbouring towns

(32) I shall perhaps cite it again: I must be pardoned these repetitions. I would avoid them, I wish to be clear and precise; but all this exceeds my ability: and however my detracters may have irrevocably decided upon the invalidity of my military powers, I could make a better use of my sword than my pen.

and cantons; and that these succours have not a little contributed to the support of this unhappy war, and to weaken every measure employed to terminate it.

It is certain that the greatest part of the inhabitants of the towns, boroughs, or villages, situated upon the frontiers of la Vendée, had their estates in this country; that their tenants, or farmers, were with the banditti, or at least favoured them, either through fear, conformity of opinion, or private interest. Hence the continual communications, and the innumerable and indispensable connexions, between the rebels and the inhabitants bordering upon the theatre of the war: both being united by the ties of parentage, friendship, mutual interest, and even prejudices, mixed and confounded together, connected as they were by these moral circumstances. The rebels attended all fairs and assemblies; their wives filled the public markets; hence innumerable connections, cautious contrivances, commercial relations, and private agreements; hence the cause of the Vendeans and their neighbours became common; hence the system of indulgence and moderation adopted by the greatest part of the administrations; hence the imperfect execution of the new laws, and fresh motives of attachment

tachment to antient habits and prejudices; hence the effeminacy and inertness of the public functionaries, both civil and military, who have sacrificed the public good in that part of France, by giving way to local considerations and affections; hence the calumnious denunciations, the libels and pamphlets, which have issued from all parts against the energetic generals, against generals truly republican, who, cool and impassible in the midst of dangers, and the snares of aristocracy which surrounded them in every shape, resisting all kind of seduction, listening neither to the reclamations nor the interested wishes of individuals which necessarily counteracted the effects of general measures, have had the courage to obey the voice of their duty alone, and to follow invariably the line traced out for them by government.

Thus, whilst our general officers fought against the armed banditti, they found themselves, in the towns adjacent to the theatre of war, in the midst of the accomplices of the rebellion. These were the more dangerous as they were the more concealed. They often covered themselves with the cloak of patriotism: they crept into the popular societies, into the administrations, and even into the republican army, where they managed

so ably as even to organise its defeats(33). The rebel chiefs took care to preserve the property of their secret agents from the horrors of war ; and when they wished to invest a town upon the confines of la Vendée, they marked out, previous to the attack, such of the public functionaries as ought to be spared (as being useful co-operators and faithful correspondents of their party,) from such as were destined to be sacrificed to their vengeance.

The Vendean Generals derived a double advantage from their correspondence with the adjacent towns ; they facilitated their military operations (34), and prepared conquests for them by opinion. The apostles of Royalty and the Catholic religion ceased not to corrupt the public spirit and to fan the flames of fanaticism, which, from some particular causes, was sure to succeed in the Southern part of the Department of la Vendée, and in that of the Deux-Sèvres(35).

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(33) Among others the Marquis de Sanglier, a volunteer in one of the battalions. He was guillotined at Tours.

(34) When the rebels besieged Saumur, a person named François, employed in the public offices, spiked several pieces of cannon in the town during the siege.

(35) Where there are many Protestants; and among other means which the agents and Catholic missionaries employed, there is one which has often succeeded, and its result may be considered as one of the first causes of the rebellion. Ever

Against so many means which militated in favour of the rebels, and which so powerfully seconded the force of their arms, what had the republican generals to oppose? Plain military measures, always insufficient in this species of war, if not supported by measures of policy, of administration, and of interior police. For it is not sufficient to fight the armed banditti, the ravages of opinion must be checked, the progress of a moral epidemical disease which, threatening all the adjacent Departments with its contagion, will not allow us a distant prospect of the termination of the successes of the Royalists. If vigorous and friendly administrations, in concert with the armed force, had seconded its efforts; if our general officers could have depended upon the concurring aid, the coaction of their respective means, they would have established without difficulty a line of demarcation between the revolted and neighbouring country; they would by that means have cut off all vicinal communication, all connexion between the rebels and their exterior accomplices who nurtured and pro-

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Ever since the beginning of the revolution they have excited simple and superstitious men to regret the destruction of the ancient order of things, by causing them to see and dread, by the effects of the measures of the new government, the heinous triumph of that sect over the Catholics.

pagated

pagated the revolt. The Vendeans, deprived of all foreign aid, and reduced to their own resources alone, would soon have exhausted them (36), and each of our victories would have carried with it a mortal blow. But what success could the invitations and solicitations of the chiefs of the armed force have with the constituted powers, which were weak, inert, or ill disposed, when frequently the Representatives of the People themselves could not obtain the full and entire execution of their mandates? Thus our generals, compelled to contract their means, were only able to take half measures, which produced fruitless victories or disastrous checks (37).

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(36) Particularly their warlike stores. It has never been positively known how they were able to procure any after the destruction of their establishments.

(37) The experience of more than twenty battles, which I have witnessed in la Vendée, has convinced me that the real advantages gained by six victories over the banditti, were not equal to the evils suffered by a single defeat. In our victories we kill but few rebels, but they kill many of our troops in their retreats, (I believe I have mentioned the reason of it) Masters of the field of battle, we there find nothing but wooden shoes, and some slain, but never any arms or ammunition. The Vendean, pursued, hides his gun; if too closely pressed upon, he breaks it, and, in surrendering his life, he very seldom leaves you his weapon.

I have seen two retreats of the Western army; (I was adjutant-general in the first, and a general of brigade in the second).

I think I have proved, that, in order to terminate the horrid war of la Vendée, the first step

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second). We lost many men, a prodigious number of muskets, about sixty pieces of cannon, and eighty waggons. During the first five months of the war of la Vendée, we gave the rebels upwards of three hundred pieces of cannon, and five hundred waggons.

We know, and we ought to know, that great or decisive battles scarcely ever owe their success to the efforts of the artillery, which is much more dreadful than mortal.

We know that the nature of the country rarely admitted of its use, and that, when it could be employed, at least it was generally impossible to give it sufficient play to promise any great effects from it.

We know that cannon produced but little fear in the rebels, as in the first battles, at a time when the greatest part of them were armed only with bludgeons, they ran upon our pieces and carried them off, even sometimes before they had been fired.

The loss of our cannon was still nothing when compared to the loss of the waggons. The scarcity of powder was already felt by the Republic, and we carried ours to the enemy, who had yet no establishments where they could make any.

The rebels, consulting locality, and being more dextrous than us, carried scarcely any artillery with them; four or five pieces sufficed for an army of thirty or forty thousand men; they were generally eight pounders, the most proper calibre for a campaign war. Sparing of ammunition, they took but few waggons with them, one alone served to supply two or three pieces. They well knew that it was not artillery that would procure them the victory, and they have

necessary to have been taken was to establish a line of demarcation between the country in rebellion, and those where example, fear, and conformity of opinions and prejudices, might cause the revolt to spread, and increase, by an inevitable junction, the main body of la Vendée.

The object, then proposed by the Representatives of the People on mission in the West, after their resolution of the 2d Ventôse, was, not only to separate the rebels from their accomplices, who remained in the country under pretence of neutrality; but also, by military operations, to cut off all communication between them and their partizans, who were dispersed throughout the neighbouring cantons of la Vendée.

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long since determined it without these accessary means, to which generally too much importance is attached, and which causes courage to degenerate, because it accustoms to fight at a distance and in disorder.

Hence it results, that, when we had met with a disasterous affair, we lost fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five pieces of cannon, and waggons in proportion, (the banditti employed our gun cartridges to the use of their muskets); and that, when we gained in a victory two or three pieces of cannon, it was without any ammunition.

After these considerations, how happens it that all our general officers who have served in la Vendée, and, no doubt, some of them are well informed, have persisted in carrying artillery there?

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It must be allowed that this measure, adopted by the Representatives Hentz, Garrau, Prieur, and Francastel, is, of all those which have been employed since the beginning of this war, the only important one, and the only one, I think, which could terminate it. All others, after experience, have been acknowledged to be inadequate, some impossible to execute, and most of them dangerous for those charged with their execution. For such is the nature of things, and the power of circumstances, in the infamous country too well known by the name of la Vendée, that a public functionary, either civil or military, who rapidly performed his duty, always found himself exposed to danger; and I speak here of every agent, whatever might be his rank in the hierarchy of powers, whose gradations they could rarely follow to secure a clear responsibility.

Thus the fear entertained by honest but timid functionaries on account of a dreadful and, perhaps, exaggerated responsibility, which it was impossible not to be exposed to (39) when in such difficult and imperious circumstances,

(39) Such of my readers as are acquainted with la Vendée, will understand me: perhaps, an explanation may be due to others; but that explanation would lead me too far.

obliged the public functionary to take an energetic and speedy resolution, which the urgency of the case, and the distance of the first authorities (40) would not admit of being submitted to their sanction; thus, and in this uncertain hypothesis, the fear of exposing himself, made always the weak, timid, and irresolute agent, adopt half measures, sometimes useless, more frequently contrary to the public interest, but which secured his personal safety. The uncertain and timid course pursued by subordinate persons, was partly the effect, and the necessary consequence of the half measures (41) so long practised, in order to stifle the war in la Vendée, and to which we may principally attribute the amazing success of the rebels.

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(40) It will be readily understood that I here speak of the Representatives on mission.

I have more than once observed, that the presence of the Representatives of the people impressed a kind of awe, salutary no doubt if only equivocal and evil minded men had felt it; but which, sometimes, faithful and honest agents have not known how to repel

(41) We shall see, in the subsequent part of this work, that the rebels were indebted to the supineness of the agents of government and the administrators for their first successes, and that the use of half measures and palliatives had nearly ruined the public cause.

It may easily be judged, by the disclosure of my general plan, whether the military measures I had adopted, supported the views of the Representatives of the People; if in other respects they were combined according to the nature of the ground, the political situation of the Vendeans, the discouragement, the kind of inertness to which they were reduced by the successes of my predecessors, and, I dare say, my own. One shall judge whether these measures could be easily put in execution; whether they did not tend, above all things, to spare republican blood, which has sometimes been so uselessly lavished in la Vendée; whether they united the operations of the different fragments of the army; whether they did not impress upon them that coherence, that simultaneousness in the motions never known, or at least never practised in the West. I appeal to all who are acquainted with la Vendée, particularly to able officers, and those who are acquainted with the locality of the country, to pass judgment upon this plan, which, being unacquainted with it, they have censured so much, because they rather wished to accuse the author than his work.

But, before I present the analysis of my general dispositions in the West, I shall just take

take a cursory view of the different periods of the war, relate the principal events of it, and exhibit the clearest causes of the prosperity and decline of the Royalist party in this part of the Republic.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

MEMOIRS

FOR THE

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR OF LA VENDÉE.

PART THE SECOND.

FROM the moment that the white flag was hoisted in la Vendée, (March 10 1793, O.S.), revolt broke out in all parts. It was even general among the inhabitants of the country, who fell upon the cities and towns, where they experienced little or no resistance. The constituted authorities, alarmed at this terrible irruption, which ought to be attributed partly to the improvidence of some, and the treachery of others, and without the means of repression, were obliged to yield to the rebels. Some patriotic administrators abandoned the country; others, more courageous, remained at their posts, and vainly opposed to the arms of the

the insurgents the force of their character and the shield of the law. Weakness and corruption became the principal agents of the Royalist party. The rebels not meeting with any sort of resistance made such rapid progress, that in less than two months they were masters of le Marais, Loroux, and the greatest part of le Bocage. Already they had taken possesion of Machecoul, Legé, Clisson, Montaigu, Saint-Fulgent, les Herbiers, Mortagne, Tiffauges, Beaupreau, Saint-Florent, Chalonnes, Chollet, Maulevrier, Chatillon, &c. &c. They made recruits in these towns and found in them arms (1) and some military stores. They then formed several corps of ten and twelve thou-

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(1) The people of la Vendée began the war with pitchforks and bludgeons; but they were not long before they had muskets Several communes had been disarmed at the period of the first movements, which had taken place in 1791 and 1792: those municipalities, which preserved their arms were attacked the first and compelled to deliver them up. Besides these the rebels found a considerable quantity in the country houses of the nobility. Many were armed with double-barrelled fowling pieces, carabines, blunderbusses, arquebuses, &c. Of these they procured a great number by their victories over the national guards sent against them at the commencement of the insurrection, and afterwards over our regular troops. It has been said that they had also received some arms from abroad. I have on this report no positive knowledge of the fact.

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sand men each ; they attacked different points at the same time and always with success. (2)

A croud of priests, of nobles, of mal-contents of every description soon united together in the principal of the conquered cities. Deserters, both Frenchmen and foreigners, antient custom-house officers, game-keepers, smugglers, servants prompted by their masters, or whom their emi-

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(2) He must be very ignorant or very knavish, who assigns an accidental and instantaneous cause for the revolt of Bas-Poitou. The Royalists had nourished it in the bud for a long time. Was it the raising of 300,000 men that occasioned partial insurrections in 1791 and 1792? Was it the raising of 300,000 men that had united, from the commencement of the revolution, so many priests and nobles in different parts of Poitou? Was it the raising of 300,000 men which from the year 1791 had destroyed all commercial connections, prevented the circulation of assignats, retained in la Vendée every article of subsistence that was destined to support the neighbouring country, and particularly our coasts from Brest to Gironde, and which had organized famine in all the places bordering upon the revolted Department? &c. &c Certainly, he must be difficult in proofs who does not find in these preparatory means the indications of a plan profoundly conceived ; of a plan the execution of which has been obstructed by various unforeseen events, among others the death of La Royerie ; of a plan which yet exists and which is connected with that of our exterior enemies.

gration had left without any employment; in a word counter-revolutionists of all classes flocked from all parts of the Republic into la Vendée, and prodigiously encreased the Royalist party, to which its first successes had already given a dangerous consistency.

However, as the rebels (3) had not yet seized upon the chief town of any Department, the superior administrative bodies appeared willing to oppose their progress. They united at different points several batallions of national guards. Some of the superior officers were selected to consult about operations with the constituted authorities, who, presuming to entertain doubts of the Republic, uncertain of the consequences of those insurrectional movements, manifested from that time by their irresolution, or the weakness of their measures, if not their being accomplices of the rebels, at least their desire to be neutral and to await the result of subsequent events before they took an avowed determination. The leaders of the armed force, become generals without the appointment of government, necessarily

(3) That is to say before the 29th of May 1793, O. S. a day on which the banditti, after a signal victory, took possession of Fontenay-le-Peuple, chief town of the Department of la Vendée.

influenced

influenced by the civil authorities which directed them, obliged to make war without plan and with soldiers raised in haste, who could neither have been disciplined, nor inured to hardship, nor practised in manœuvre, and besides very inferior in number, were constantly beaten by the rebels, who derived great advantages from those easy victories by the quantity of arms and ammunition which the vanquished troops abandoned (4) to them.

At last the government, from whom undoubtedly the true state of things must have been till then concealed, fixed their attention on la Vendée, and sent there a few general officers with some detachments of regular troops. These succours, which a month sooner would have repressed the revolt, were then insufficient to extinguish it. They were rendered still more feeble by scattering the good troops and mixing among them the newly formed batallions composed

(4) Why were these victories so advantageous to the rebels? Because the soldiers whom we then employed in la Vendée, broken at the first shock of the enemy, began by throwing away their firelocks and cartouch boxes, and the field of battle was covered with arms and accoutrements: so that in an affair in which we lost 200 or 300 men, the Vendeans gained 1200 or 1500 muskets, &c &c

in part of fathers of families; whereas at this crisis the most warlike troops would have been necessary to balance only the advantages which the rebels owed to local situation, to their superiority in the habit of using fire-arms, in fine to the habit of victory.

We ought to attribute in part the astonishing progress of the Vendeans to their submission and their entire confidence in their generals and their priests. The latter, then confined to hold a secondary rank, were most useful co-operators to the party. They assisted the chiefs powerfully by all the manœuvres familiar to the apostles of fanaticism. They presented them every where as the saviours of Religion and of Royalty; as men appointed by God himself to guide his people and protect his worship. These priests had of course the gift of prophecy. They employed also the resources of magic to convince, by means of impostures, minds that were heated, and already too much disposed to enthusiasm and to the wonderful, by ignorance and superstition. Miracles were soon spoken of in la Vendée: here the Virgin had appeared in person to consecrate an altar provisionally erected in the woods; there the Son of God himself had descended from heaven to assist at a benediction of

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the colours; in another place Angels had been seen, adorned with their wings and rays (5), announcing and promising victory to the defenders of the Altar and the Throne. (6)

These supernatural occurrences always happened at night, and often on the eve of an expedition. They formed the chief subject of the sermons of the day, in which the preachers, the missionaries of the party, warranted to the victims of battle a glorious resurrection in this life (7) as

(5) Many of these ridiculous scenes took place in the woods near Chemillé, since the year 1792; that is to say nine or ten months before the war. It should be remembered that at this epoch there had been movements in la Vendée. The government sent commissioners there who only palliated the evil, and who, supposing they were faithful, were, however too ignorant of the place and of the arts employed for a long time by the enemies of the Republic to suppress the germ of the revolt. The immediate presence of a considerable armed force was then requisite to bridle that wretched country. The commissioners made fine speeches which could not, however, counteract in the minds of the Vendeans the effect of the sermons and pastoral instructions of their priests; and these commissioners thought they left la Vendée in peace.

(6) This was the favourite qualification of the chiefs of la Vendée.

(7) It is proved that the Vendeans believed for a long time that they would revive three days after their death. Wives and mothers used to preserve the bodies of their children and their husbands

well

well as in the other. To all this was added the celebration of mass, and the Vendeans intoxicated with all the poisons of fanaticism, quitted their churches only to rush upon the enemy, faced with audacity the greatest dangers, sure to conquer or to receive in death the palm of martyrdom.

Another cause contributed to give the chiefs of la Vendée this despotic influence which was necessary to enable them to govern a party composed of so many heterogenous elements. In this croud of counter-revolutionists which the revolt had rallied in Poitou, there were found individuals of high name, titled men of quality. Those who had directed the first movements of the rebels, and who, for the most part were but simple country gentlemen, knew how to avail themselves of circumstances to maintain themselves at the head of the party; and they were much sought after and caressed by these men of high nobility, of whom they were only the feudatories, the vassals in the order of the feudal hierachy, and who in other times would have, without doubt, disdained their succour and assistance. Thus we saw the Talmonts, the d'Autichamps, the Lescures, &c. closely connected with obscure beings, such as Pyron, Joly, Stofflet, Charette, &c. and the

the former, as well as the latter, happy to be the lieutenants of the Beauchamps and the d'Elbeés.

We ought to place in the number of the causes of the astonishing prosperity of the rebels the species of madness, of ebriety, which they derived from unexpected successes. These would serve but to augment their confidence in their generals, whose efforts and talents were each day crowned with victory. Add to this the critical situation of the Republic, whose misfortunes these chiefs took great care to exaggerate; the rapid and victorious march of the Austrian and Prussian armies on our frontiers; the little consistency of our military forces in the West; the hope to bring over to the Royalist party the first generals employed by the Republic in la Vendée, or at least to disperse them, to lead them to inactivity; (8) the frequent desertions of the troops of the line; even of considerable parts of different corps sent to the banks of the Loire; (9) the public mind corrupted in all the neighbouring

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(8) Such as the commander in chief Biron. I dont know if it was good policy to send a man of the highest rank, whom his connexions ought to have rendered justly suspected, to attack a party that wished for a King, for Priests and Nobles.

(9) I speak of the Legion of Rosental and of the Germanic Legion. The latter was disbanded at Tours during the last days

Departments, in consequence of the correspondence and manœuvres of the agents who were secret accomplices of the revolted citizens; about 200,000 soldiers, half of whom were armed with firelocks, and already inured to warfare by twenty battles, or rather by twenty brilliant victories, so connected by local situation and by the disposition of their posts that, if I may be allowed so to express myself, they seemed to form but one square batallion, placed on a central point, the diagonals of which they traversed alternately in masses of 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 men, &c. &c. These were the principal motives of hope and encouragement that animated the people of la Vendée.

Such was the confidence of the chiefs of the Royalist party in their forces, their means, their resources, that they disdained in the time of their prosperity to demand foreign succour. They did not call for it until they had lost their political consistency. (10)

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days of June. The greatest part of the soldiers (especially those of the cavalry) who composed it, went over to the enemy with arms and baggage.

(10) It is when a party is fortunate that it should seek auxiliaries to maintain its power. Misfortune does not make allies for us.

The

The defenders of the Altar and the Throne, seeing the mass of their proselytes augmenting daily, perceived the necessity of establishing a government, to regulate the political movements of their new state, to direct alike all its parts, to repress all ambition distinct from the general cause, and to prevent so many various interests from dividing themselves, from counteracting and crossing each other, and from injuring by individual pretensions the harmony of military operations and of administrations. They formed a sovereign council, composed of several general officers (11), of priests, and of some other agents, strangers to the profession of arms. This sovereign council united in itself all authority; the acts which emanated from it were made in the name of Louis the Seventeenth. The ancient laws, substituted in place of the new ones, preserved to la Vendée monarchical forms. The national money was proscribed, and an assignat could not have currency unless invested with the signatures of several members of the council.

The sovereign council made frequent proclamations, to nourish in the Vendeans hatred to the

(11) Among others, of d'Elbée, Lescure, des Essarts, Stofflet, Fleuriot, Beauchamp, &c. Bernard of Marigny presided. The council was held at Chatillon.

Republic, attachment to the Catholic religion, and to Royalty; they related in them, they exaggerated the successes of our exterior enemies, and they dissembled our victories.

They supposed that most of the provinces were in open revolt against the National Convention and the Republican Government. The circumstances which took place on the subject of Federalism (12), and the divisions in the French

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(12) It is not for a soldier, occupied solely in his profession, and who has not quitted the army since the beginning of the war, to decide, to pronounce concerning great party disputes, in which the Commonwealth is too often forgotten. Two words, however, upon Federalism. From the time it became the subject of discussion, some pretended partizans of the unity of the Republic, animated with a zeal which ought to have been suspected, because it was exclusive, sought for every where, and *of course* found every where, abettors of this new faction. A multitude of men, who were called Federalists, were pursued, persecuted, imprisoned, transported, guillotined. It seemed as if they were known by their countenances. It was then said—*the Hydra of Federalism is cast down, and the Republic is saved.* Very well. At present, they say that *Federalism is but a name*; *that Federalism has never existed*. Be it so; although it does not appear to me to be well proved But for this, is it necessary to revive all the causes of hatred, to exercise new vengeance? Must the persecuted become persecutors, and the conquerors of the day be as little generous as those of yesterday? True patriots lament the mournful effects, which the turns of political

senate at this epoch, had shaken the public confidence. This was a favourable occasion for the chiefs of the rebels to increase their power, and to give to la Vendée some influence over our political system. From hence the project of several members of the council, and particularly of the Generalissimo d'Elbée to direct military operations, to attempt conquests towards the South, where most of the Departments, agitated, wrought upon in every way by the agents of the different parties that rent the Republic, not decided on the conduct they should pursue in such difficult conjunctures, seemed to seek a rallying point. Let us turn to these wretched times, let us recollect the violent crisis, the terrible convulsions that France experienced, and the cruel uncertainty of her destinies, and we may judge how many chances these deplorable circumstances offered to the Royalist party. Oh liberty! Oh, my country! How many dangers yet menace you! May God avert them!—But let us return to la Vendée.

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litical chance, and the sanguinary struggle of parties, have hitherto produced. Is it not time to adjourn, or rather to smother our quarrels, and to occupy ourselves a little more about the public cause? I hope I shall be pardoned this digression

The sovereign council determined those military plans, the execution of which had been always so successful, until the ambition and rivalship of some general officers had fettered it, and their obstinacy in thwarting the projects of the council, and eluding it's orders, had occasioned several important expeditions to fail. I shall speak again on this prime cause of the decline of the party.

The principal object of the chiefs of the rebels was, and ought to be, to organize the army; without which, the crowd of adventurers scattered through la Vendée, whose number was daily augmented, might give offence to the inhabitants of the country, abandon themselves to the excesses which follow from want of discipline and organization, and this armed mass, composed of so many different elements, might be no more than a principle of disorder and confusion. They formed different corps of infantry (13), of cavalry, and even of artillery, from among the foreign recruits: it was the troops who were paid (14) and disciplined that formed the strength of

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(13) They had, among others, a corps of infantry, composed chiefly of foreign deserters, who bore the name of *Avengers of the Crown.*

(14) There were some corps which were not paid, mostly the free companies: but every thing necessary for them was provided in abundance.

the

the army. All the natives of the country, in whom consisted its chief force, on account of their numbers, were classed into companies, the companies into communes, the communes into divisions. This troop was never assembled but to go on expeditions. One or more divisions of it were united at the point nearest to that which was intended to be attacked: to these were joined a part, a strong detachment of the regular troops, and they marched against the enemy. When the expedition was finished, the activity of the inhabitants ceased, who, whether conquerors or vanquished, returned to their own homes (15). But they were easily assembled next day, if necessary. In most of the villages, relays were prepared for the couriers (16) who carried the orders of the sovereign council and of the generals, and the Vendean at the least signal, on the first notice, quitted his hoe for his musket, and appeared at the rendezvous full of audacity and confidence. They went to battle as to a feast: women, old men, priests, even children of twelve or thirteen

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(15) It was seldom they were kept together two or three successive days, and never for a longer time.

(16) Orders were circulated with the greatest facility, all the commanding situations being near each other, and the communication open.

years

years of age (17), (and I have seen some of them slain in the first ranks of the army) excited and partook of the fury of the soldiers. It was this species of madness and enthusiasm that, in the ages of darkness and ignorance, urged our first crusaders to the burning plains of Africa and Asia. The defenders of the Altar and the Throne seemed to have taken our ancient worthies for models. Their banners were ornamented with devices which recalled the high deeds of chivalry. Their wives, their mistresses, signalized themselves by a courage above their sex, and, above all, by a ferocity which disgraced it. New Camillas, new Penthesileas, were seen braving every danger, and bearing terror and death into the ranks of the republican army (18); and, after victory, as-

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(17) Neu, pueri, neu tanta animis assuescite bella,
Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.

Æneid, l. 6.

(18) Among others one la Rochefoucault, and a young woman named Lescure, sister of one of the chiefs, who gave in several combats examples of intrepidity. The latter was at the attack of Thouars (Sept. 14, 1792, O. S.) which her brother directed, and where he was vanquished. At this battle, there was a woman who served at an eight pounder during the whole of the action, and who did not abandon it but with life. They assure us it was la Lescure.

There were many women killed in different affairs. In that of Gesté (Pluviose, second year) one of the chiefs of the banditti

sisting with a barbarous joy at the long and sanguinary tortures which the unfortunate prisoners were made to undergo (19).

Among the chiefs of la Vendée were distinguished d'Elbée, elected Generalissimo, Bonchamp, Lescure, Bernard of Marigny, Pyron, Domanié (20), the Prince de Talmont, d'Autichamp, Stofflet, la Roche Jacquelin, the two Fleuriots, the two de Bruc, Langreniere, la Haye des Ormes, Saint Hilaire, d'Auterive, Gaston, la Roche-Saint-André, Rostaing, Souleyrac,

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banditti army was a woman dressed in man's apparel. Three times she rallied her broken troops, and led them back to battle, then she found death.

(19) Among the acts of perfidy and atrocity which have been committed in la Vendée by women, there is one which I cannot help relating General Dufour passed through a wood at the head of a column his flanking parties brought him two young girls, whose appearance bespoke a genteel education. They intreated the General to protect their honour and their lives, and he, to render both more secure, sends them under an escort to an habitation not far off Ten or twelve stragglers stop there these two girls invite them to rest themselves, give them drink, and, after the departure of the republican column, they make a party of the banditti surround their house, and massacre the volunteers whom they had detained in it

(20) Killed at the siege of Saumur. He commanded the cavalry.

Berard,

Berard, Savin, Catelinau, Charette, la Cathelinière, Joly, Sapineau, Baudry, la Roberie, &c. &c. They had all in view the same end, the re-establishment of the Catholic religion, of the Nobility, and of Royalty: but all possessed ambition, and some had pretensions to the supreme command, chiefly Talmont and d'Autichamp, who thought their birth entitled them to it; and Charette, who was supported by a numerous party. Nevertheless, d'Elbée was elected Generalissimo, and from thence Charette separated himself from them in discontent. He had 40,000 men under his command: he brought with him Joly, Savin, la Roberie, and some other chiefs of less note, and was joined by la Cathelinière, who commanded 12,000 men in the neighbourhood of Machecoul and Princé. Bonchamp, whom his military talents rendered him a worthy competitor of d'Elbée (21), remained with him, as well as the other general officers.

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(21) During the five first months of the war, d'Elbée preserved his prisoners; many of them suffered themselves to be corrupted, and joined the army of the rebels. The others, and they were the greatest number, underwent the severest treatment. They were often threatened with being sent to Charette, the most ferocious of all the chiefs, which would have been to send them to die. Some perished, and the rest were

There were then two very distinct armies. The principal army called the Catholic and Royal army, otherwise the army of Anjou and of Upper Poitou, commanded by d'Elbée, and the other called the army of Lower Poitou, or the army of Jesus, directed by Charette, much less considerable than the other, under the command of the Generalissimo, but he could not dispose of it as he pleased, because the hatred that Charette bore to him made that chief always separate his plans and operations from those of the grand army.

Both armies had, as I have said, two kinds of troops; but the army of d'Elbée (22) much

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were delivered by the Republican army after the victory at Chollet, (October 1793, O. S.). From this period no more prisoners were made on either side; with this difference that the Republicans were contented with shooting the Vendeans, and that the Vendeans made our soldiers suffer unheard of punishments.

When Charette took Machecoul the second time, he caused all the patriots of the city to be assembled, added to them some prisoners he had taken in the battle, and thus seven or eight hundred men were shot together. They were thrown confusedly into a ditch, which was immediately filled up. The greater part of these unfortunate persons were only wounded and were buried alive.

(22) D'Elbée was a nobleman of Poitou. Born to a slender fortune, he went very young into Saxony, where he

stronger than the other, and particularly so in the regular troops composed of foreigners. There followed it, also, a great number of men, whose name, fortune, or more particular connections with the leaders, separated them from the crowd, and who served as volunteers.

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had some relations, (I believe I have heard him say his mother was a Saxon) and there he entered into the service, but not making such rapid progress as he might have expected from being a foreigner and from his talents, he returned to France, and entered as Lieutenant in the Dauphin regiment of cavalry In a little time afterwards he solicited a company, and discontented at being refused, he quitted the service and retired to his estate near Beaupreau. He possessed the confidence of his district. He knew how to augment it at the epoch of the revolution by making connections that prepared for him such influence in the county as was necessary to direct the meditated insurrection. He did not however take any part in the first movements, which he considered as premature, nor was it till the first days of April, when a strong party of the rebels came to seek him, that he put himself at their head. D'Elbée thought the revolt had broke out too soon in Poitou, because according to his plan, which was also that of la Royerie, it ought to have manifested itself at the same time in Brittany and in Anjou.

To an agreeable and distinguished appearance, d'Elbée united the character and the talents necessary for the leader of a party. A consummate soldier he formed the Vendeans to fight in such a manner as was most conformable to the nature of the place, and the genius of that people. Convinced that the success of most battles depends on the violence

In organising the military force, great attention was paid as well to the persons who composed it as to the means of providing them with every necessary supply.

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lence of the first shock, and consequently that the chances are in favour of a violent and impetuous attack, above all in a broken and covered country, where it is almost impossible to rally a broken army, he always procured to the rebels the advantages of aggression He never suffered himself to be attacked; though in superior force, and even in a situation favourable for defence. This is the art with which he combined and directed his attacks he knew how to give to the charge of his troops an action, an impulse so rapid that it was, I may say, irresistible; although he almost always fought in a parallel order, it was his skill in advancing towards and turning the flanks of the enemy, in avoiding to engage his cavalry, always too weak to promise success, in placing it in the second line and in rendering ours useless by his dispositions, in employing but little artillery, in forseeing and calculating so well the consequences of an affair that defeat occasioned him but little loss and that victory procured him considerable advantages In fine, it was his system of acting always in a mass against the Republican army, which circumstances and sometimes the ignorance of its generals obliged to act only in detachments, that occasioned him to gain twenty signal victories. His lieutenants were beaten every time they departed from his principles

D Elbée was gifted with eloquence. He expressed himself with grace and facility. His eloquence was soft and persuasive He knew well how to vary his action and his tones With the rebels, he often assumed the manner of a person

 inspired,

It had its commissaries, its treasurers, its agents of every kind, very active, very intelligent, and above all very faithful.(23)

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inspired, and he had so far acquired their confidence and their attachment that after his death I have seen the Vendean prisoners shed tears when they heard his name pronounced.

Wounded in the affair of Chollet, he took refuge in the Island of Noirmoutier. His chagrin and the little care he had taken of his wound had rendered it mortal. He was shot according to the sentence of the military commission. D'Elbée was 42 years of age He was so weak that he was obliged to be carried to the place of his punishment.

Bonchamp was the only general officer of whom d'Elbée made particular account. He looked upon Stofflet and Pyron as very useful officers. He seemed to entertain nothing but contempt for Charette.

(23) There is no example of an agent of the Royalist party having betrayed it, or even quitted it voluntarily.

A gentleman of la Vendée of the name of Dupuis, who had served in the regiment of Béarn, and had become Aide-de-camp to Langremere, was suprised in Argenton-le-Peuple by a party of hussars.

I knew this young man had been much with the general officers of the rebels, and that he could give me important information. I employed every possible means to engage him to make known to me the projects of the enemy. I went so far as to promise him life, which some tender connections might cause him to regret ; but it was impossible for me to draw a word from him. He was guillotined at Saumur, and died with great courage.

Magazines

Magazines of warlike stores and establishments for the fabrication of arms were formed. A great quantity of gun-powder was made every day in several towns, particularly at Mortagne and at Beaupreau. It is astonishing that all the operations of administration and of interior organization, which seemed to leave no time to the leaders for other occupations, did not slacken the course of military operations; for they fought almost every day, and often in several places at once. It is also astonishing that in the midst of this agitation and continual movement, inseparable from the daily events of this terrible war, the fields were cultivated and agriculture did not seem to suffer from the frequent but always momentary absence of the Vendeans.

While the chiefs of the Royalist party laid in la Vendée, the foundations of a formidable power, which, attacking the Republic in its center, seconded, by this interior diversion, the irruption of foreign satellites on our frontiers; the army of the West, then the army of the coast of Rochelle, began to assume consistency and force. Some troops had been detached from the army of the North, out of which were formed several batallions, called the batallions of Orleans, the city in which they were organized. The army was also augmented with some batallions sent spontaneously

neously into la Vendée by several Departments, and lastly with some cavalry and a few batallions of chasseurs. These troops were divided over different points of the semi-circle (24) which was formed by the Republican army about la Vendée. This system might have been good to stop the progress of the rebels, but we should have confined ourselves then, and until the army had been more considerable, to a defensive war; to fortify all the posts that were occupied by us, chiefly those of the first line, and to organize in them means of resistance proportioned to the means of attack, to the audacity, and the intrepidity of the assailants.

The Republican army, thus dispersed over an immense extent, did not present at any point sufficient force to act offensively: yet this was done. Attacks were made alternately on all sides without order, without plan, without concert or unanimity in the operations; and by this partial and successive movement of different divisions and sub-divisions of the army, we forced

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(24) The territory in charge of the Western army was divided by the Loire into two parts nearly equal. The army formed a circle round the revolted country, and the river was the diameter of it. But at this epoch the right bank giving no uneasiness, almost all our forces were directed to the left.

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the enemy to make counter-movements on the offensive. We were beaten every where, and indeed nothing less could be expected.

This partial and solitary aggression of each detachment of the Republican army, was attended with melancholy consequences. It was weakened in men, and so much discouraged that it was impossible to preserve all the posts of the firſt or even of the second line, which were successively carried by the Vendeans. These people, attacked in their haunts by inferior forces, soon passed the bounds which they would not perhaps have been able to break, if, as I have said, the Republican Generals had adopted, at least for some time, the defensive system (25), and had endeavoured

(25) In standing on the defensive, you would have forced the banditti to leave the strong country to attack you on the plain or in your entrenched positions, then you would have prevented the extreme inequality of your forces: you could have brought forth a great part of your artillery, you would have preserved the superiority of your light cavalry who beat the rebels upon every occasion where they were able to act and to spread themselves, you would have given encouragement and confidence to your soldiers, chiefly to your new levies (whom the very cry of *There are the banditti*, made them run away ten leagues) by making them fight in places of resistance, in fortified posts; the more so as the Vendeans never knew how to attack the leaſt work of a fortification. Of this we have been since convinced, by seeing them miscarry before les Sables, Nantes, Angers, Granville, &c.

to cut off all communications with the rest of the country, the effect of which, when open, was to augment daily the strength of la Vendée.

The banditti, after having carried all the out-posts which covered Fontenay, Niort, Parthenay, Thouars, Doué, &c. shewed themselves in the plains at several points, in masses of 40, 50, and 60,000 men: and many very sharp and bloody affairs happened. Some corps of the Republican army, victims to the inexperience of the Generals, and of the disastrous system which was then followed, were cut to pieces. A short resistance was made in some unfortified posts, but the contest was too unequal. The rebels were conquerors every where, and, in less than fifteen days, carried Fontenay-le-Peuple, Parthenay, Thouars, Doué, all the intermediate posts, and at last Saumur (26), June 9, 1793: and, whilst they obtained these advantages in the East and South-Eastern parts of la Vendée, they conducted themselves with the same audacity and the same superiority in the Western part, and the divisions of Charette's army menaced Nantes, and advanced even to the cannon of les Sables.

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(26) I shall enter into some details concerning the capture of this town.

It was in this general inundation of la Vendée over the surrounding plains, that it became easy to know the immense resources of a party which we appeared to disdain. Its power and its forces could no longer be dissembled; and certainly they were very culpable who, being spectators of its terrifying progress, deceived government with regard to the political and military situation of the rebels; or the government itself (27), who

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(27) But, I shall be told, that, at this time, all France was not armed; we had not 1,200,000 men formed into regiments: the enemy menaced our frontiers on all sides; and if, in the origin of the war of la Vendée, the government did not send more and better troops there, it was from inability. I mention this objection, because it was made to me. It is not difficult to overthrow it.

I know that, at the time when civil war was kindled in the West, our principal military forces were divided between the two armies acting on the Moselle and in the North, that the plan of General Bournonville, and the disastrous campaign of Treves, which was the consequence of it, had ruined the first; that the second, directed by Dumourier, (who is not perhaps such a stranger to the war of la Vendée as he is believed to be), were entirely disorganized, and, besides, diminished one-half by four successive defeats, &c. But still our frontiers were not broke through; none of our fortresses of the first line were attacked, and seven or eight thousand good troops sent into la Vendée at the end of March would have been enough to repress the insurrection, especially as the leaders had not been able to effect a revolt in

knew all the extent of the evil, ought to reproach itself for having taken such feeble measures to contend in la Vendée with the Royalist party, the fury and exertions of which, always successful, threatened France with a total subversion.

I ought to place here some observations on the reproach so often made against our General Officers who have been employed in the Army of the Coasts of Rochelle, of having divided their forces too much. Let us see how far this reproach is well founded. Let us examine if those who have accused the Generals knew precisely what they meant by this pretended division of forces. By following me with some attention, it will be found, that what I am going to advance does not destroy what I have already said concerning the danger of partial attacks. If the reproach be addressed to the different Commanders in Chief who have succeeded each other in the West, for having made the army take up too great an extent of territory, and for having divided it into sections and posts round la Vendée, this reproach does not appear to us well founded. Place in any

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Brittany. I will say more In all cases, it would be better to ungarrison our frontiers, than to suffer a party of rebels to acquire consistency, for whatever may have been the progress of Austria on our territory, without doubt it was not so dangerous as that of la Vendée.

point

point you please of the interior of France a party of insurgents, it will be necessary that the forces destined to destroy them be divided on the different posts surrounding the revolted country, to preserve its vicinities from conquest or contagion; and unless you are favoured by some local circumstances, such as a river, a chain of mountains, or some other natural barrier, or, in fine, unless you can rely upon the dispositions of those who are in the neighbourhood of the theatre of revolt, you will be obliged to form a circle with your army (it being understood that the line shall not be without interstices). It will then be necessary that your army occupy several posts on the whole circumference. It will be necessary that each of these posts be sufficiently strong either from its position or by its fortifications, or from the number of troops it will contain, or in the facility with which it can be speedily assisted by the flanking posts, to resist the united forces of the rebels, who will make all possible efforts to break your line, especially if, as in la Vendée, they are encouraged by the secret wishes, or seconded by the connivance or treachery of the inhabitants of the adjoining countries. From whence we must conclude, that the army of the Coasts of Rochelle should have been al-

ways stronger (38) than the Catholic and Royal armies (and it has been always much weaker), since the principal posts of a very extensive semi-circle should have been occupied, and, besides this, the coasts protected from foreign invasion, and all communication cut off with the interior ennemies. This is enough to prove, that local dispositions obliged the Commanders in Chief of the army of Rochelle to form with the army a kind of line of circumvallation round la Vendée.

But this reproach may have some foundation if addressed to the Generals of division of this army. The desire of preserving equally all the points of his position, led a General to subdivide his forces too much, and the posts became weak, because they had been made too numerous, having been frequently taken one after another. In general, to make war in la Vendée with advantage, the chiefs of the principal divisions of the army should always keep their forces collected. To be even with the banditti every precaution must be taken to prevent a surprise; consequently, patroles are preferable to advanced posts, and, indeed, ad-

(28) This must not be understood literally. I say stronger, if not in number, at least in the kind of troops. It is not recruits that will do in la Vendée, nor those soldiers who are called *Heroes of 500 livres*.

vanced

vanced posts ought not to be considered as points of resistance, but only of observation and notice: the result would be, that few men would be required for them, and a general officer might easily guard and protect the whole of his force.

Masters of Fontenay-le-Peuple and Thouars, after two complete victories, the rebels (22) approached their centre, and appeared to direct their efforts to the posts which covered Saumur and the borders of the Loire.

The battles, and, consequently, our defeats, succeeded with a dreadful rapidity. Ligonier,

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(29) It was General Chalbot who commanded the division of Niort, beat under the walls of Fontenay. He lost fifteen or eighteen hundred men, a prodigious quantity of muskets, twenty-five or thirty pieces of cannon, and tumbrils in proportion. General Quetineau, the friend and creature of Dumourier, defended Thouars. Although that town was not fortified, it was capable of making resistance. It is surrounded by a wall, and has its gates, &c. &c. Some works might have been added, which would have augmented the means of defence, and, I have already remarked, the banditti knew not how to attack a post slightly fortified. Quetineau had more than six thousand men, and he resisted only two hours. With Thouars was lost 7 or 8,000 muskets, 12 pieces of cannon, 20 tumbrils, and all the garrison, &c. It is necessary to observe, that, when the rebels take a town, they pillage all the public coffers, and frequently the citizens who are pointed out to them as patriots.

General

General of the Republican army, after having been repulsed with considerable loss at Vezins, Coron, Vihiers, &c. occupied Doué, a post easy of defence (30), and the only one that could save Saumur. He there disposed his division as if he wished to be beat, and which he was completely, and obliged to retire in disorder upon Saumur. It was not with an army so discouraged, and so often beat, without confidence in its chief (31), and withal so unequal in strength; it was not in Saumur, which offered no means of resistance on the side of Doué, that it was probable the rebels could be stopped. It was resolved, but too late, to concentrate the different divisions, and, in consequence, General Salomon, who commanded 5000 men at Thouars, evacuated by the Vendeans a few days after its capture, was

(30) Although I mention this post as easily defended, it must not be understood to be fortified. Doué is open on all sides, but surrounded with plains and heights, presenting some advantageous positions. And, in general, I consider every open country extremely favourable for engaging with the rebels of la Vendée, when a general officer knows well the management of his troops, and, particularly, how to derive a proper effect from the use of artillery and cavalry.

(31) I am mistaken, for Ligonier was superseded immediately after the affair of Doué. It was General Menou that defended Saumur, and who had never done any thing to lose the confidence of the army.

ordered

ordered to the relief of Saumur; but Salomon met at Montreuil the right wing of the enemy's army, consisting of more than twenty thousand men, who obliged him to retreat after a long and bloody battle, which took place in the night.

Dispositions equally bad were made at Saumur as at Doué, besides having the disadvantage of position. Too great an extent was given to the line; and much strength was supposed to be acquired in occupying the heights of Bournant, and the means of defence, according to custom, were dispersed. The rebels attacked, (32) where they ought to have been expected, by that chain of heights which commanded the castle and consequently the town, and took in flank all the advanced posts stationed on the road to Doué. Thus a new and splendid victory was obtained by the rebels; the capture of Saumur and the free passage of the Loire became the result of this fatal day (June 9, 1793, O. S.).

(32) I have been assured the besieging army was 80,000 strong. I think it was an error in obstinately defending Saumur, for it would have been better to have evacuated it, destroyed the bridges, and directed every effort in defending the passage of the Loire. In resisting at Saumur, we fought when we could little hope for victory; our forces were diminished, discouragement in the army augmented, Angers and les Ponts de Cé, &c taken, and in short the fate of Nantes compromised.

After

After resting eight or ten days at Saumur, the rebels directed their views towards the right bank of the Loire, menaced Tours and Mons, and took Angers. They gained several recruits, but they did not excite in Anjou and the adjoining provinces such movements as they had flattered themselves with, and this no doubt was the principal reason which induced d'Elbée and some of the members of the Sovereign Council not to carry back the war on the right bank, when they had failed before Nantes, which they attacked the 29th of June, 1793, O. S.

The siege of Nantes is perhaps the most important event of the Revolution. Perhaps the fate of the Republic depended on the resistance of this town. Every thing preceding that memorable day seemed to guarantee success to the Royalist party. Nantes, open at all points on this side the Loire, presented a contravallation for near two leagues in extent, and seemed incapable of resistance. Its only fortifications were a few ditches, some parapets or mounds thrown up in haste. The cannon had been augmented by some pieces of large calibre taken from the navy; but the outer parts and the avenues to the town offered no positions, no advantageous situations, to promise any great effect from the artillery. The garrison consisted of ten thousand

men.

men, mostly composed of the national guards: the besieging army on the right side were forty thousand, to whom victory had been continually faithful from the commencement of the war: an army of equal force, commanded by Charette, invested Nantes on the left side, and their numerous friends and communications with the town seemed ſtill more to facilitate the entry of the rebels.—Notwithstanding Nantes was saved, and it must be confessed never was an attack worse combined or worse directed than this; whilst on the contrary the defensive measures were executed with order, concord and unanimity: the enemies within were carefully restrained from revolt, and a victorious resistance on all points was opposed to the fury and obstinacy of the assaillants. (33)

The safety of Nantes was owing to General Canclaux who commanded there, as well as to the zeal, talents and incredible activity of General Bonvoust who directed the artillery, and

(33) I have not been informed whether d'Elbée commanded the attack of Nantes.

The events which might have followed the capture of that town were beyond calculation. It was the signal for general insurrection in Brittany. We should have lost all the points which he had kept at the Loire, the caſtle of O, Paimbœuf, the magnificent eſtabliſhment of Indret, all the poſts ſituat-

above all to the intrepidity of the volunteers, who, deprived of the protection and support of every kind of fortification, had only their native courage to oppose as means of defense against the numerous means of attack and terrible efforts of the rebels—Immortal glory to those generous defenders of their country, whose heroic devotion to the cause saved Nantes from becoming the tomb of Liberty! (34).

Thus circumstanced General Biron, who had long been expected, came and took the command of the coasts of Rochelle; he established his head-quarters at Niort, where he united between eighteen and twenty thousand picked men, selected from the army, consisting of about sixty thousand regular troops. He confided his advanced guard to the famous Westermann, who had lately arrived from the North with his legion; whilst on the other hand the division of Saumur, so often beat under Ligonier and entirely dispersed after the affair which took place under the

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ed on the coast, from the Loire to les Sables, the islands of Bouin and Noirmoutier, would necessarily have fell into the hands of the Vendeans.

(34) I regret not recollecting the names of the different corps who defended Nantes. I remember the 109th regiment gained great glory. The battle lasted from three o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon.

walls

walls of that town, was reorganized at Tours (35), by the activity of the representatives of the people and the general officers. The losses it had sustained were repaired by the arrival of nine or ten batallions of new levies brought post from Paris by citizen Santerre. Dispositions were made to re-enter Saumur and Angers, evacuated by the rebels; when Westermann, borne by his audacity and inexperience, surprised Lescure in Parthenay and gained possession of this advanced post of the enemy. This little success made this general officer conceive the hopes of traversing the whole of the revolted country and entirely destroying the Vendeans. He came back to Saint Maxent, joined several batallions to the main body of his army left at Parthenay, and followed by seven or eight thousand men and ten

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(35) It was in this town, and after the capture of Saumur that the Germanic legion was disbanded. In my opinion this was a great error. We had not troops sufficient, and yet we deprived ourselves of a body of 1800 men, which would have been of the greatest utility.—But it was tinctured with aristocracy, in that case the officers might have been changed.—What was the result of disbanding this corps?—Why three-fourths immediately passed over to the enemy with arms and baggage. If it had been even necessary to suppress this corps it surely was not the time when we were unfortunate and beat every where.

or twelve pieces of artillery he proceeded as far as Châtillon, which he took. This advantage, like our other *victories* as they were called, was made so much of that the army gave way to the most extravagant notions, eagerly expressing, who should be the first to enter la Vendée; every one was fearful lest Westermann should conquer it before they could have a share in the glory and recompense destined for the conquerors of the rebels. Unfortunately however the triumph of Westermann was of short duration: two days after the capture of Châtillon he was surrounded, all his infantry cut to pieces, nor could he save a single cannon, or tumbril, and it was with the greatest difficulty he escaped himself with his cavalry.(36)

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(36) Almost all the field pieces which Westermann had with him consisted only of flying artillery. It must be remembered that whilst he was routed at Châtillon, General Biron remained quietly at Niort, twenty-five leagues from Châtillon, with sixteen or seventeen thousand excellent troops, instead of approaching his advanced guard and supporting him. Westermann, in augmenting the army which he commanded for the purpose of attacking Châtillon, obliged eleven or twelve hundred fathers of families to march, belonging to St. Maxent and Parthenay, almost all of whom perished in the expedition, whilst M de Biron and his division were encamped and inactive under the walls of Niort!

I never

This check, one of the most disastrous experienced in the West, did not render us the least wiser; and notwithstanding the disproportion of forces and means, dispositions were made for fresh attacks as insulated and as badly concerted

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I never knew Westermann, although both of us were employed in the Western army for some time; we were always at a distance from each other, as we served in different divisions, and he quitted the army at the moment I took the command, having obtained leave of absence from Carrier, the representative of the people.

What I say of this general officer, to whom certain men have raised a colossal reputation, is no more than the result of opinion of forty officers who served with him, and some of them even in his own legion.

Of all the qualities necessary for a general officer, Westermann was in possession only of bravery. Fitted perhaps to command a squadron of hussars, he never owed his success to any well concerted dispositions of his own, but to the intrepidity of the volunteers which on many occasions he uselessly sacrificed. He was long an object of scandal to the Republican soldiers, in setting an example of indiscipline and disobedience to superior orders. More than once he compromised and suffered the army to be beat, when he directed the advanced guard on the right bank of the Loire (in Brumaire and Frimaire of the second year) and exposed the several generals in chief, whom he treated with the greatest possible contempt, to reproaches on their unsuccessful operations, which frequently were caused by his ignorance, by the false movements he gave to the advanced guard, and to the low jealousy and aversion which he bore to the general officers of the army, to the head of which he was aspiring.

General

as the preceding. Notwithstanding so many melancholy proofs, it was imagined we were in a state to go and fight and vanquish the Vendeans in their strong holds, in their covered country; so strongly did we deceive ourselves.—Even supposing the Republican army considerable enough to act offensively, it was at least necessary that all the different divisions should move forward at the same instant, so as to operate various diversions on the part of the rebels and oblige them to divide their forces—the division of Niort, the strongest in number as well as in the excellency of the troops, should have made the principal attack—it was necessary, as we were determined for attack, for the other divisions to approach and second that of Niort, and thereby

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General Grignon, one of my fellow companions in arms and misfortunes, has published a Memoir, justifying his military conduct in the West. His officious defender, consulting the circumstances of the day, has not failed to insert a pompous eulogy on Westermann, and he believes himself not far from truth when he places Hannibal under this general! We will not withold the great justice due to Grignon, who was very useful in la Vendée by his local knowledge, as to imagine that he co-operated in this ridiculous eulogy, so foreign from the object of the Memoir. In other respects this is only another proof of the extreme complaisance of certain officious defenders and their happy manner in using the style and colours of the day.

render

render the offensive movement perfectly general, at the same time to secure points sufficient for escape, for preventing the enemy from falling on our flank column. But instead of this, what was done? Biron remained with his division inactive at Niort: that of Tours commanded by general la Barolière, instead of attacking by Doué, Thouars or even Parthenay, which would have enabled him to have been supported by the army of Niort, Saint Maxent, &c., entered la Vendée by les Ponts de Cé, more than thirty leagues from Niort, and encamped in the environs of Martigné-Briand (37), where he was attacked by forty thousand rebels, and where his advanced guard was broke in ten minutes; notwithstanding, some lucky circumstances, and the vigorous charge of three squadrons of hussars, procured victory to the Republicans. The army pushed on and encamped at Vihiers (38), where it was attacked the same day at four o'clock in the afternoon, when night put an end to the battle and left the victory undecided; but the next morning the banditti charged with redoubled fury and with

(37) 15th 1793, O. S. This was the first affair at which I was present in la Vendée. I arrived the day before from the army of the Moselle. I served in quality of Adjutant-General, chef de brigade.

(38) July 17, 1793, O. S.

fifty

fifty thousand men, and the day finished with the most dreadful defeat of the Republican troops.(39) In comparing this day with that of the fifteenth where we obtained the advantage, I am sufficiently convinced that whilst our victories brought us little to rejoice at, our defeats occasioned us most horrible loss. In endeavouring to rally the army at Chinon (fifteen leagues from the field of battle) three days after the action, only four thousand men could be mustered; but let it not be imagined the rest were taken or killed, for in all the neighbouring towns some were to be found, whilst others never rested till they arrived at Paris.

We have seen the divisions of the army of the Coasts of Rochelle successively beat in the East and South-East part of la Vendée, by the grand Catholic and Royal army; that of Lower Poitou, directed by Charette occupied the whole of the country separating Nantes from les Sables, excepting a few posts which we had kept along the coasts and at the mouth of the Loire, at the castle of O, Paimbœuf, Pornic, Bourgneuf, St. Gilles,

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(39) The representatives Bourbotte and Turreau, as well as la Chevardière, commissary of the Department of Paris, may recollect that I foretold the defeat of the army if the position of Vihiers was kept.

the

the islands of Bouin and Noirmoutier, and which we certainly could not have kept with the trifling force we had, if d'Elbée and Bonchamp had acted in that part. The Republic had scarcely any regular troops at these different points; the majority of those employed on many occasions, consisted of national guards, principally from Nantes; so that Charette's army, although much inferior in every consideration than the grand Catholic and Royal army, having less force to contend with, and fewer obstacles to overcome, obtained success at an easy rate, but of less importance; for the object of Charette should have been to get possession of some fortified posts on the coast to have enabled him to have received support from abroad, if the checks the Royalists might receive should force him to that resource. Thus I cannot account for the operations of Charette, (40) which seem reduced to a mere trifle; because at the capture and re-capture of Machecoul, he had scarcely any thing to do (anterior to August, 1793, O. S.) than to overrun the whole country and render himself master of

(40) I do not mean that Charette had not many battles, but that he never had a general battle, which he carefully avoided. It will be seen in the course of the work what was his manner of making war.

what he pleased. It must be confessed likewise that the Republican generals were guilty on the same side of the same faults as the divisions of Niort, Saumur and Angers had been on the other side. Marcé, Petit-Bois, and the famous Beysser (41), as ignorant and not less presumptuous than Westermann, acted partially and mutually suffered themselves to be beat by Charette's lieutenants; at last Canclaux (42) arrived, and judging

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(41) This was another who enjoyed the momentary reputation of being a great general. There was some analogy between him and Westermann. He had little successes like him, but he had frequently the most disgraceful defeats. The battle of Montaigu, described in the Third Part of these Memoirs, resembles greatly that of Châtillon, which I have mentioned. In both places the enemy was in the town, before the general was beat.

(42) I do not know Canclaux, nor shall I pronounce upon his political opinions But judging from his military operations, I am convinced he has more talents than any of the general officers employed in the West.

I am obliged, in speaking of the War of la Vendée, to name several general officers who have served in the West, to judge, and often to blame their operations. I shall always give my opinion with caution and politeness, but as the progress of the rebels ought in some nature to be attributed to the false military measures employed to destroy them, it is impossible for me to dispense making them known. Nor shall I hide my own faults, nor spare them that censure I give to others, for indeed it is high time the language of truth should be spoke on this unfortunate war.

with reason that the forces with which he saved Nantes were not sufficient to attack the rebels in a covered country, contented himself with harassing them at the gates of that town, with keeping the important posts which Charette would not take, and repairing the follies of his predecessors.

The deprivation of a volume of notes, which I had collected on the War of la Vendée, from its very commencement until the moment I quitted

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war. Until now the War of la Vendée has been discussed only with the accent of passion and according to the spirit of faction. All the writings hitherto published carry with them that spirit of party which dictated them—They are either libels or tales, nay, sometimes dreams. Of such a nature at least is the work, answering perfectly well its title, which we owe to the leisure hours of Adjutant Legros, during his imprisonment in the Conciergerie. Citizen Hector Legros does not fail to lay at my door the causes of the duration of the war of la Vendée, and in daring to advance that I have misled the government on the events which took place whilst I had the command, he endeavours to exculpate the ancient committee of Public Safety, who has been reproached with having deceived the National Convention on our situation in the West.

The work of citizen Hector Legros is a complete libel against me. It is terminated by a vast plan of campaign sufficient to evince the military talents of citizen Hector Legros. Amongst other dispositions he would cover the Sevre (a very small river running through la Vendée,) with floating batteries to destroy the banditti and their haunts.

the command of the West, prevents me from enlarging upon the original causes and motives of this extraordinary war. Moreover, independent of the first ideas after which the chiefs of the Royalist party had concerted their vast conspiracy, there are a thousand other local, secret, and unaccountable causes, even to the most attentive observer, which have equally contributed to the prodigious increase of the partizans of la Vendée. It is owing to these secondary and eventual causes that my perceptions are too vague and uncertain to permit me to dwell long upon this subject; but some cannot be passed over, as they principally owe their existence to that unlucky system followed by the army of the Coasts of Rochelle, of partial attacks, and of the insufficiency of the repressive means adopted by the government, as well as all the half measures adopted by its subalterns.

It was in the space of six months that the Royalist party gained the *maximum* of its power in la Vendée. The chiefs began to act their parts in the political world; their names were advantageously known, and cited in the different courts of Europe. Several emigrants had quitted the frontiers of Austria and Holland to join the defenders of the Altar and the Throne. A great number waited in the islands of Jersey and Guern-

sey

sey the result of the last efforts of the rebels, to enter their native country, and rend its bosom. The deplorable situation of the Republic gave each day fresh hopes to its enemies. But the genius of Liberty, who watched over the fate of France, the energy, the constancy, and the courage of the patriots, were destined to make it triumph over its internal and external enemies.

Such was the consistency of la Vendée, such were the resources of the Royalist party, that, notwithstanding the terrible, and perhaps indispensible, measures employed to destroy la Vendée; notwithstanding our ten successful general battles, and more than sixty partial ones, gained on the borders of the Loire, from August in the first year until Floreal following; notwithstanding the loss of 120,000 soldiers, the Royalists still had means left to continue the war, although weak, it must be confessed, when I quitted the army; and our victories, as I shall demonstrate in the third part of this work, were not the only causes of their decline.

END OF THE SECOND PART.

MEMOIRS

FOR THE

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR OF LA VENDÉE.

PART THE THIRD.

THE Chiefs of la Vendée were arrived at the highest degree of ascendancy possible; and their means of preserving themselves in this state of prosperity were so much the more powerful in proportion as they were more concentrated. The territory occupied by the rebels, being but of small extent, gave them more firmness, and seemed, as one may say, to constrain them to act always in a body; a system to which they owed their success. Each party was eager to collect the fruits of the earth, and the war for a moment seemed to suspend its fury. During the end of July and the beginning of August, there only occurred a few skirmishes, affairs of parties, and of

advanced

advanced posts, except the siege of les Sables, where the banditti miscarried, and the attack on Luçon, where they were likewise beaten and sustained great loss. I shall speak of this affair hereafter.

The army of the Coasts of Rochelle was in a state of observation; the division of Niort had continually been so; that of Saumur, so worsted at Vihiers in the battle of the 18th of July, was compelled to remain inactive: the troops of Luçon had kept themselves continually upon the defensive, and this wise measure gave them the victory, although they were very weak. A great revolution then took place in the army of the coasts of Rochelle; it began by the fall of a great man: Biron was deprived of the command. The Executive Council appointed a *Sans-culotte* General for his successor. Rossignol came to take the command of the army, and established his head-quarters at Saumur. This promotion, which was opposed by so many powerful men, and occasioned by party intrigue, was no less a very happy event in the West. The rebel chiefs were alarmed at it; they clearly found that they had nothing to hope from a Republican General, whose principles were not equivocal, and that Rossignol would not be so complaisant as his predecessor.

The

The elevation of Rossignol to the first rank in the army, produced also a salutary effect upon the public mind. It stopped that moral defection which daily drew off numerous partisans from the Republic: people clearly saw that they must decide; that neutrality was no longer allowed; that patriotism could not compound with aristocracy. The greatest part of the administrators, and agents of every kind employed in the country bordering upon la Vendée, and who till then had sought (and had but too well succeeded) to render themselves neuter, and to live well with both parties, were obliged to declare themselves. Many of those who had secretly favoured the Vendeans, and who dared not act with them, became Republicans through fear; and if all the ill-disposed were not suppressed, at least their intelligence with the rebels was no longer so frequent, their means so easy, nor their succours so powerful.

Rossignol (1) reunited at Saumur the wrecks of that division; his forces were not considerable;

(1) I am the friend of Rossignol, and I glory in it, but this ought not to prevent me from delivering my opinion on his account: *magis amica veritas*. Brave, frank, loyal, disinterested, Rossignol has all the qualities of a Republican, and has not the necessary talents for a General Officer. And this does not contradict what I have said above concerning the

he employed them usefully, and his first operation was to attack a strong party of banditti which occupied Doué, and to carry that post. This little success re-animated the troops, discouraged by so many successive defeats. The General insensibly led on all the division (2) to Doué, where, however, we had but six thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry, of which citizen Santerre took the command in the capacity of commander in chief of the division. Rossignol being ill remained at Saumur; he had thrown some troops into Thouars, and we were masters of the important post of Ponts-de-Cé.

Whilstwe endeavoured to repair the evil suffered from so many fruitless attacks; whilst we acted up-

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happy effect produced upon the public mind by the promotion of a plebeian to the command of the army. The only thing for which Rossignol can be reasonably reproached is, in suffering himself to be surrounded by such indifferent officers, when he stood in much greater need of having able ones near him; and, being often ill, he could neither act nor observe any thing by himself. The checks he met with when he pursued the rebels upon the right bank, have been attributed to his unskilfulness. they might also be attributed to the envy which some general officers had against him, and to the disobedience and the contempt of his orders which were the consequence of it.

(2) I belonged to this division in quality of General of Brigade.

on the defensive, expecting the powerful reinforcements which government intended sending to the West, a cause, then unknown, prepared the way for our successes, and might, more than the efforts of our arms, draw the Royalist party towards its decline and ruin.

A spirit of division and quarrel sprung among the rebel chiefs. I know not whether it was a political manœuvre of our government; but every thing induces me to think they merit not the honour of it; and, by what d'Elbée told me, it should seem to have been nothing more than the effect of individual passions, and the ambition of his competitors.

They forgave not d'Elbée for being the general in chief; they forgave him still less for having talents for it. Lescure, d'Autichamp, and above all the Prince de Talmont, were ambitious of the supreme command; Charette, equally ambitious, had usurped the command of the army of Lower Poitou, which ought, as well as the grand Catholic and Royal army, to be under the command of the Generalissimo. They were not jealous of Charette; but they were envious of d'Elbée, Bonchamp, and the Chief of the Council. This leaven of intestine division had fermented for a considerable time; and, since the taking of Saumur, several parties had been formed among the

General Staff Officers of the rebels. The constant success of the Catholic armies only augmented the individual pretensions, and raised the ambition of the inferior officers. They intrigued on all sides; they became angry; the dissension soon reached as high as the Supreme Council, and troubled its deliberations; the party opposed to d'Elbée often predominated, and caused the plans resolved upon, and which were conformable to the system which had succeeded so well, that of operating in a body, to be changed; each was desirous of acting with the troops lying within his own limits, and formed projects according to his own mode. Their operations thus became private; d'Elbée and Bonchamp were excluded from all expeditions; by that means they reserved to themselves all the honour of success, and success could alone give them the necessary ascendancy in order to destroy these two chiefs, who owed their credit and influence to nothing but their talents, their services, and their victories.

This division produced the most fatal consequences to the rebels, and, by following with me the succession of events which have happened, we shall rest satisfied that it is the primary cause of the decline of the Royalist party in la Vendée.

Charette had just been beaten under the walls of les Sables, a place sufficiently strong to afford

a shelter against a sudden attack, and consequently impregnable against the banditti, who attack a fortified town as they do an army in order of battle.

Charette hoped to take his revenge at Luçon, and prepared to attack it. A commander of a division of the grand army was desirous of being of the party, and to second the army of Lower Poitou. Luçon is without defence, but surrounded by immense plains, where artillery and cavalry can be used; its out-works present also some points of support, which can supply the inequality of force and procure the advantages of position to a very inferior army. There were nearly seven thousand men at Luçon, and some pieces of flying artillery. It was attacked on the 6th of August; and Charette, who had promised the pillage of it to his soldiers, exhorted them to press forward to the attack, in order that they might become masters of the town before the arrival of the division of the grand army, and so prevent them from sharing part of the booty. Charette's troops were completely beaten; and the division of the other army, which did not arrive till after this check, was defeated in its turn. This action was very bloody, and cost the rebels seven or eight thousand men. The advantage of this day was chiefly owing to the flying artillery, which

which was perfectly well served, changed its position frequently and rapidly, and produced an astonishing effect upon all points.

These two checks experienced by the rebels, and those that immediately followed them, were likewise owing to another cause, which I shall explain.

D'Elbée was desirous of discontinuing all military operations in the season wherein the labours in the fields were carrying on in full activity, in order that the Vendeans might not be drawn from them; it was difficult then to take them away from their daily employment; indeed, many knew how to elude the order, and failed to appear at the general rendezvous. This was a proof of their repugnance to carry on the war at a time when their interest required them to stay at home, and this was no doubt less a powerful reason for deferring the expeditions. Not only the division which existed among the Chiefs admitted no other than partial operations, but each principal section of the army which acted secludedly, found itself also weakened by the desertion of a great number of men, who absolutely refused to march, and by the discontent even of those that obeyed.

The defenders of the Altar and the Throne divided themselves at the moment when they stood

stood in the greatest need of co-operation and union; for measures were taking to give the Royalist party a most dreadful blow. The garrison of Mentz arrived; that of Valenciennes was to follow it; some corps also were added to our Western army, and these military means were supported by extraordinary measures; fire and sword were to be carried into the recesses of la Vendée; the banditti were to be pursued to their most secret retreats, their habitations burnt; in fine, the country was to be entirely destroyed, and nothing was to be left in those perfidious parts but heaps of slain, ruins, and ashes, dreadful monuments of national vengeance. Moreover, the local circumstances, the difficulty of carrying on a war in the woody country, the obstinate resistance of the banditti, the horrors they exercised towards the prisoners and patriots that fell into their hands, the danger of suffering them to continue their political existence any longer, the acknowledged insufficiency of the means hitherto employed to destroy it, and the experience of the past, and the fears for the future, seemed to justify the severity of these measures.

The Representatives of the People on mission with the armies of the Coasts of Rochelle and Brest, met at Saumur, convoked a council of war. The Generals in Chief, Canclaux and Rossignol,

signal, as also the Generals of Division of both armies, were summoned to attend it; the Generals of Brigade had no deliberative voice in it. Eleven Representatives, and eleven General Officers, attended this council. The object was to agree upon a plan for a general attack (3), and to determine whether the principal attack should be made by Saumur or by Nantes. The march of the garrison of Mentz, upon which the greatest hopes were reasonably founded, was submitted to the determination of the council of war. It was to enter la Vendée by Doué, if it were to be attacked by the East; or to go to Nantes, if it were to be attacked by the West. In the first case, it was to be under the command of Rossignol; in the second, under Canclaux; and whatever might be the determination, the troops at Mentz were to compose a part of the division which should form the principal attack.

Some General Officers insisted that the attack should be made by Doué; citizen Santerre pre-

(3) I was General of Brigade. I observed to the council, that, as military operations alone were to be agitated, it appeared to me that the General Officers only ought to deliberate, saving that the result of their deliberations should be submitted to the Representatives of the People, &c &c. My proposition did not succeed. This council of war was held the 2d of September.

sented

sented a plan which was rejected, and one presented by General Canclaux was adopted, who, having planned that the attack should be made by the West, naturally found himself charged with the direction of all the operations. It was Rossignol's generosity that turned the scale in favour of Canclaux; for the division was equal upon the question concerning the side upon which the attack should be made (4). Thus it was decided that the principal attack should be made by the West, and the garrison of Mentz repaired to Nantes.

The object of the council of war, in my opinion, absolutely failed; for, in the first place, before a plan for a general attack was formed, it seems to me, that a general plan for a campaign ought to have been determined on; the complete execution of which would necessarily lead to the termination of the War of la Vendée. This project of a campaign, this preliminary plan which ought

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(4) It was well understood, that it was not the plan of citizen Santerre which divided the opinions, the plan was not a military one. But General Menou opposed with reason Canclaux's system for attacking by the West. The latter pretended that it would take the enemy in the rear this was knowing very indifferently the position of the rebels, who formed a front in every direction, and had no other rear than a square battalion.

to have had several branches, once resolved upon and considered as a fundamental system, would have served as a basis for every operation which would have successively concurred in its complete execution. Every plan, therefore, for a general or partial attack, was only a secondary one. That of Saumur was certainly not a plan for a campaign, and yet it was a plan for a campaign that was to have been resolved upon.

In the second place, if they would have consulted locality, and have only cast their eyes upon the map, they would have been convinced that the dispositions for an attack were not combined according to local circumstances, and that they diminished their strength in attacking by the West.

In fact, what ought to have been the end intended by an offensive system, by a general plan against the banditti? it should not have been to drive them from their retreats, but to destroy them there; and, under this consideration, to have so combined the dispositions that as few as possible might escape. Now, the country occupied by them forming a kind of square, of which the sea and the Loire, those two insurmountable natural barriers (5), formed two sides, it is clear

(5) I suppose the Loire to have been guarded, which might easily have been accomplished.

that they should have endeavoured to have closed upon and driven the enemy into the angle formed by the Loire and the sea, and, consequently, to have attacked by the opposite angle.

In attacking by Nantes, many of the banditti escaped, and innumerable openings were left, and upon points not fortified: in the contrary hypothesis, there was only the passage of the Loire to be defended. Nantes is impregnable on that side towards the river. Should the rebels have thrown themselves again into the South-Western parts, they would have found only plains, which are not favourable to them, and the town of les Sables, which they would not have attacked, or at least to no purpose.

We boldly affirm, that it was neither according to local circumstances, nor according to the principles of the war, nor according to the topographical situation of the rebels, that they decided. The true motive for the determination was, to deprive Rossignol of the command (6).

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(6) It might be very well to prefer Canclaux; but it was no reason for making the attack by Nantes. I enter into some details concerning this resolution of the council of war of Saumur, because it has had much influence upon ulterior operations, even after it was executed. If it were a fault to attack by Nantes, it was a still greater one to give so small a

 force

According to the plan of Canclaux, the divisions of the army of the Coasts of Rochelle remained upon the defensive, and only advanced in order to join him under the walls of Mortagne at a time agreed upon (the 4th of September), whence he was to march with this united force against Chollet, the central point of la Vendée.

The march of Canclaux was very well planned; but that this order of march might be executed, we must suppose that Canclaux ought not to meet with any obstacles from the enemy from Nantes to Mortagne, or that he would surmount them all within the time determined on.

However this may be, the council of war of Saumur produced much good; the danger of partial attacks was acknowledged; our defeats were attributed to the little union hitherto observed in our operations; and the plan for a general attack proved that the system was changed.

Canclaux at last entered la Vendée with three columns formed from the division of Nantes, of which the division of Mentz composed the major

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force to Canclaux, in order to make the principal attack (he had but 18,000 men). It will be seen in the course of this work how prejudicial this has been to us.

part.

part. He carried, after some severe conflicts, all the first points occupied by the enemy. The post of Sainper, Machecoul, Legé, and some other intermediate posts, were carried by our troops: soon after, Beysser, who commanded the right column, entered Montaigu, where the rebels made but a feeble resistance.

But Beysser met with the same fate at Montaigu as Westermann did at Châtillon. He made such bad dispositions, and was so briskly attacked, that his troops were broken before he had arranged them in battle, and the banditti conducted them back to the gates of Nantes. Canclaux, who occupied Clisson, was no sooner informed of the defeat of Beysser, than he prepared to retreat; but, attacked himself by the enemy, he could make his retreat no otherwise than in disorder. He saw his baggage and equipage carried off, his wounded strangled, and was forced to rejoin Beysser under the guns of Nantes.

They were obliged to abandon the plan of being at Mortagne on the 14th, and of forming, at the time agreed upon, the union of the division of the army of the Coasts of Rochelle with the division of Nantes. It was also necessary to appoint a fresh general rendezvous for these divisions, which it was dangerous to lead on without being certain of the position of that of Nantes.

Ros-

Rossignol, who was ignorant of it, could not reasonably direct his columns to the place agreed upon; for, if the division of Nantes made no diversion, he would then have had to fight, in the woody country, the whole mass of the banditti. We were in this state of uncertainty, when we were forewarned at Doué, in the night between the 13th and 14th of September, that we should be attacked the next day by a division of the grand Catholic and Royal army. The battle began at day-break (7), and without the town. We reckoned there were about 7000 combatants, of which 500 were cavalry, and without including 5 or 6000 men raised in a mass, armed with pikes and placed in the rear, because they would only have been useless or in the way. The whole of our artillery consisted of two twelve pounders, two field mortars, and some pieces belonging to the battalions. The rebels advanced in one column by the road of Angers, and displayed themselves under the fire of our cannon. I saw by the uncertainty of their motions, and the weakness of their attack, that the good appearance of our

(7) The success of this action was due to the dispositions of General d'Ambarère, an officer belonging to the army of Génie, and who did not quit the division of Doué. It was he who planned the position, and formed the line.

troops

troops and our advantageous situation surprised them, and I considered them as conquered. They directed their chief efforts against our left wing, which they compelled to give way by a dreadful discharge of musketry; but our cavalry having taken them in flank upon that point, and at the same time our right wing, which I commanded, having charged and broken their left wing, they were completeley routed, and pursued for upwards of three leagues by our cavalry, which made great slaughter amongst them.

I was in several engagements wherein the banditti were commanded by d'Elbée or Bonchamp. It was easy to be perceived that neither of them was in this action. The first manœuvres of the rebels, their bad dispositions, and their false motions during the battle, proved that d'Autichamp and the Prince de Talmont, who commanded them on that day, were still very young in the art of war.

The same day Lescure attacked Thouars with ten thousand men, and met with the same fate as Talmont and d'Autichamp (8). These two im-

(8) D'Elbée assured me that it was contrary to his advice that the affairs of Thouars and Doué took place, which compelled Lescure, Talmont, and d'Autichamp, to undertake these expeditions with such forces alone as were at their own disposal.

portant

portant victories, that of Luçon (9);" &c. &c. ought to have made us sensible of the advantage we should have had in fighting in the plains, and acting upon the defensive upon the open points, so long as we were not sufficiently strong to penetrate into la Vendée.

Rossignol being ignorant of the true situation, and the operations of the acting columns in the Western part, imagined they had succeeded, and that the attacks on Thouars and Doué were only a consequence of their progress, which had compelled the rebels to proceed against him. Unhappily this conjecture proved false. The grand Catholic and Royal army had as yet only exposed itself by parties; and it was very wrong to advance into the woody country with divisions of five or six thousand warriors, embarrassed with artillery, and by a heap of men raised in a mass, which weakened them still more. It was also wrong to give the command of the columns to General Officers of but little experience. Rossignol committed these errors; and, encouraged by the success of the affairs of Doué and Thouars, and otherwise excited by the advice of Ronsin,

(9) The division of Luçon, after its victory of the 6th of August, wished to enter la Vendée, it advanced as far as Pont Charon, where it was completely defeated.

whom

whom the result of the council of war had dissatisfied, and who wished to be the first to penetrate as far as Chollet; Rossignol, I say, suffered himself to be led on. Citizen Santerre, who commanded the division of Doué, and General Duhoux, at the head of that of Angers, received orders to go before and direct their march towards Chollet; and what appeared extraordinary was, that the division of Niort and Luçon, which should have followed our motions, according to the resolution of the council of war, and which were already in motion, received counter-orders. We fell again into the wretched system of separate attacks; a fresh experiment was wanting to correct this error in us.

Citizen Santerre set off from Vihiers, his troops disposed in one column only, and marched against Coron (10). The brigade which I commanded

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(10) I have read in a work, entitled, *The Posthumous Works of Philippeaux, Representative of the People*, that a division of the army of Rossignol, forty thousand strong, was beaten at Coron by three thousand of the banditti—and that is the way they write history! Citizen Santerre had not above six thousand five hundred regular troops in his division; it is true, we must add eight or ten thousand men raised in a mass, but which ought at least to be considered as useless. The Representatives of the People could affirm, if it were necessary, that I had been to reconnoitre the enemy, and I declare that

 their

was at the head. I learnt by the heights of the iron grate, that is to say, within gun-shot of the village, that it was occupied by the rebels; there was, however, only a weak party, which gave way to the charge of some hussars, and evacuated it. I gave an account of it to citizen Santerre; I asked for orders, but received none.

I insisted upon our halting at the pallisades, and that, before we advanced, we should recon-

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their force amounted to upwards of thirty thousand men. I shall enter into some particulars relative to this affair, because citizen Santerre, being sent for by government to give an account of his conduct, has taken the liberty to cast upon me, in some degree, the ill success of that day. The presence of the Representatives of the People, who were *at the head of the column*, would be sufficient to exculpate me, as they have never reproached me. Moreover, without daring to contend in military opinion with citizen Santerre, let me be permitted to tell him, that a General Officer ought to be at the head of the column he commands; that, upon the first news of the enemy's approach, he ought immediately to go and reconnoitre them, to point out the position the army ought to take, and to order the expanding of his columns, for I must observe to citizen Santerre, that they do not usually fight in columns, &c. &c. &c. Now, it is a fact, that I did not see citizen Santerre during this affair, nor did I receive any order from him, although I was in my place; I was obliged to obey those of a General of Brigade who was older than myself (Ronsin), and to spread my brigade, without which it would have been defeated in a column like the rest of the army, &c. &c.

noitre

noitre the enemy, whose precipitate retreat from Coron might be a snare in order to attract us there, and cause us to quit the advantageous heights of which we were masters. Ronsin disdained this advice, and ordered me to march. Having descended into the village of Coron, I observed by my glasses that the enemy were advancing rapidly and in force. There were no means left of retreating, and regaining the position we had just abandoned. We instantly seized upon an elevation above Coron. I informed citizen Santerre of our motions, and of the approach of the rebels, whom I was going to reconnoitre. Their dispositions for an attack were already made; they formed a crescent, and counteracted the effect of our two twelve pounders and the two mortars, placed in a battery upon the high road, by three eight pounders placed in their centre; I judged their number to be about thirty thousand. I told Ronsin that there was not a moment to be lost in making preparations. The battle did not last an hour (11), and the republican

(11) During the action my horse fell upon his back, and rolled over me. I was carried off. I had scarcely quitted the line a quarter of an hour before disorder began to appear in every part, &c.

I quitted the West a few days after the defeat at Coron, and was obliged to set off immediately, although wounded,

army was broken and put to flight. We lost but few men, because there was only my brigade that suffered; but the enemy seized upon almost the whole of our artillery, some muskets, and an immense number of pikes, which the men, raised in a mass, struck in the ground as they retreated.

The next day, at Saint Lambert, the rebels fell upon the division of Angers; General Duhoux was completely beaten, lost all his artillery, his baggage, and a greater number of men than citizen Santerre; he had, like him, a great number of men raised in a mass, who left their pikes and wooden shoes for the enemy.

In the mean time, our affairs were recovering on the side of Nantes. Canclaux had recommenced his motions, and retook all the posts which Beysser's ignorance had caused him to lose. Become master of Clisson and Montaigu, he had pushed on as far as Syphorien, and had there resisted a powerful attack from the rebels, when he was dismissed the command. I am ignorant of the motives for his dismission; but certainly there must have been very powerful ones for it, and it could not have happened at a more unseasonable time. If Canclaux did not deserve con-

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to take the command of the army of the Eastern Pyrenees, having received the appointment of General in Chief with my brevet of Commander of a Division.

fidence,

fidence, they should not have given him a general command; but ought it to have been taken from him, ought he to have been removed from the army, at the moment when he was executing a plan approved by the Representatives of the People, at the moment when his absence might have retarded the operations of it, and even have endangered its success? Happily the new General in Chief, Lechelle, incapable, as it was said, of commanding, had at least the wit to pursue the plan traced out by his predecessor. The army preserved all its energy; and this event, which might have produced fatal consequences, deferred only for a few days our progress and our victories.

The General in Chief of the army of the Coasts of Rochelle endeavoured to repair the loss which two of his divisions had met with in the engagements of the 18th and 19th of September, and to second, by a better regulated march, the operations of the divisions of Nantes, the progress of which he was then acquainted with.

The divisions of Niort and Doué had joined each other at Bressuire ever since the beginning of October (12), from whence they dislodged

(12) According to a resolution of the new council of war held at Saumur on the 2d of that month. At that time the army of the Coasts of Rochelle took the name of the Western Army.

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the rebels, in order afterwards to attack Châtillon, which was taken, retaken by the enemy, who overthrew one of our columns, and again retaken by the republican troops, who from thence directed their march towards Mortagne, the general rendezvous, where they found the division of Luçon and that of Nantes.

This last, in penetrating as far as Mortagne, met much fewer obstacles than might have been expected. It had not yet had to combat the mass of the grand Catholic and Royal army; and although it had every day very bloody actions with the rebels, it was only against detached divisions from their chief army, whose partial defence indicated its disunion and its approaching disorganization, provoked by the ambition of its chiefs and the rivality which had divided them.

The army of Nantes wanted reinforcements. The daily and very bloody battles it had had to sustain almost at every step, had considerably diminished it; so that, after its junction with the column of Doué, Niort, and Luçon, it amounted in all but to twenty-eight thousand men, when it appeared before Chollet, which the rebels evacuated in the night.

I gave an account upon the spot of the dispositions made by General Léchelle under the walls of Chollet, after the town was taken; they were

not

not very military. He was attacked by d'Elbée, Bonchamp, Lescure, Pyron, Stofflet, and several other chiefs of the grand Catholic and Royal army, which, in spite of the checks it had met with, and the privation of several corps drawn off by those of their chiefs who were preparing to pass the Loire, amounted still to forty thousand fighting men. The shock was dreadful; the Republicans gave way, and victory for two hours declared in favour of the Vendeans. But the firmness of the Representatives of the People, the coolness and ability of some general officers, the re-union of the different parts of our army, which the nature of the ground and the disadvantageous position rendered slow and difficult, and above all the disappearance of d'Elbée, Bonchamp, and some other of the Royalist Chiefs, mortally wounded, gave the advantage to the defenders of the Republic, and decided the fate of this famous day.

Before we speak of the consequences of this important affair, though doubtless less decisive than it was generally thought to be, let us return to some anterior events.

I have said, and it may be seen in the course of this work, that it was a principle with the rebels never to suffer themselves to be attacked, particularly not to defend the towns; to abandon them

them upon the approach of the Republican troops, but after the next day, and sometimes even on the day they quitted them, to attack such of our generals as were so imprudent as to continue there. Thus we ought not to be surprised at seeing them successively surrender all those before which the garrison of Mentz made its appearance; but we might reasonably be so at seeing them retire as far as Chollet without a general engagement, and without appearing in a mass before the division of Nantes, and attacking it with all their forces.

It is not difficult to explain the causes of this conduct, if we recollect that the chiefs of the Vendeans were disunited. Divisions and party spirit had only increased since their first reverses. Talmont insisted more than ever upon passing over to the right bank of the Loire, and making Laval the common centre and rallying point of the different parties formed against the Republic. Although d'Autichamp might not have precisely the same object, he yet wished that the war might be carried back again to the right bank, in order to march against Paris; and in case of failure, to seize upon one of the posts in Britanny or upon the Channel, to offer their hands to the foreign enemy, and, if necessary, to receive succours from them. In fine, both agreed that the

party

party could not support itself upon the left bank.

Some checks, for which d'Elbée could not be blamed, and above all the intrigues of his rivals, had insensibly diminished his power and influence. Thence resulted that division in their forces, that want of unity and co-action in the operations, and above all the defensive system, (so little favourable, or rather so contrary to the mode of fighting used by the Vendeans) which facilitated our success. The chiefs were desirous of facing in every part; each of them obstinately resolving to defend his circuit, opposed his division to a Republican column. The same steps were pursued against the invincible garrison of Mentz, against which all their efforts ought to have been united: and although victory might often appear to vary; and that the rebels had resisted with advantage, or at least counterbalanced ours at Torfou, St. Christophe, Quatre-Chemins, Châtillon, &c. yet it was nothing more than trifling success which momentarily retarded the march of our columns, but which did not cause them to retreat.

Such was the blindness of the concurrent parties of the enemies of d'Elbée, that the passage of the Loire was determined upon before the affair of Chollet; and troops had been disposed

upon different points of the shore destined to embark themselves, as well as to protect the embarkation, and landing on the opposite side, of that multitude of priests and nobles, their wives, their children, and their suite, who, at the approach of the Republican columns abandoned la Vendée where they had settled themselves, and went to seek new habitations upon the estates of the Prince de Talmont.

Thus when the junction was formed between the army of the coasts of Rochelle and the garrison of Mentz, and the chiefs of la Vendée had perceived, though too late, the dangers which threatened them, and the necessity of a general action, d'Elbée could no longer oppose all his forces against the Republican army.

But it is more particularly to Charette's conduct that this succession of disasters, which have accelerated the downfall of the Royalist party, should be imputed. This general, at the head of a numerous army, made no movement when the division of Nantes, which he might have taken in the rear, daily fought against d'Elbée's troops. I have seen the latter convinced that Charette was desirous that the chiefs of the grand army might pass over to the right bank, in order that he might remain master of the whole of la Vendée and direct its forces. In effect, always removed

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from the centre of operations, he made no efforts to succour or second the grand army; even at the time of the affair of Chollet. He never would act for the interests of the party, the ruin of which was inevitable by his desertion and the foolish project of Talmont and d'Autichamp.

When the division of Nantes seized upon the port Sainper, Machecoul, Legé, Montaigu, &c. it met with no very great resistance, because hitherto it had only to contend against the troops of Charette, who always endeavoured to avoid it; but when it had passed the heights of Montaigu the battles became frequent and terrible. It was then upon the territory(13) of the army of Upper Poitou, more warlike and above all better commanded than that of Charette, and which was not less defeated than his, because, as I have before said, it acted only in detachments; and Charette, who, as well as the other Royalist Chiefs, knew that the object of the combined

(13) La Vendée was divided into two circuits: each army had its own. That of Charette occupied the districts of Chalans, Machecoul, la Roche-sur-Yon, les Sables, a part of the districts of Paimbœuf, Clisson, Montaigu, &c. The army of Upper Poitou comprehended the districts of St. Florent, Vihiers, Chollet, Châtillon, la Châtaigneraie, a great part of the districts of Clisson, Montaigu, Thouars, Parthenay and Fontenay-le-Peuple.

march of the Republican columns was to penetrate to Chollet, suffered the division of Nantes to pass, advanced towards its right wing, and remained a spectator of its conflict with the grand Catholic army.

Vanquished at Chollet, the Vendeans dispersed, according to custom, and re-entered their hiding places; but all strangers that were in the country, who formed a part of the Catholic armies, being united under the command of Talmont, passed the Loire with many useless followers, who did not belong to the army, whom the dominion of the rebels had fixed in la Vendée, and whom the presence of the Republican troops drove from it; and although nearly thirty thousand individuals (14) crossed the river, there were not twenty thousand warriors among them. However, information was sent to the Convention that there was an end to the war in la Vendée; that the left bank was completely purged of rebels, and that the small number of those that survived

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(14) There was seen upon the right bank following this army, which increased prodigiously, a multitude of bishops, priests, monks, religious persons, old countesses, baronesses, &c &c. who were carried off by cart loads, and which did nothing but embarrass the army. There were a great many killed in the action of Mans.

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the battle of Chollet, had passed over to the right bank, with four or five thousand women, &c. (see the Journals of the day.) Extraordinary couriers were sent into all parts of the Republic to announce this happy event; and all France imagined no more would be heard of la Vendée.

It must be allowed that it was the division of Nantes, in which was the garrison of Mentz, which gave the most dreadful blow to the rebels. Its march, however, was too rapid for it to be so destructive as has been said. It was doubtless an advantage to force the main springs of the grand Catholic and Royal army, that heap of foreign soldiers who formed a rallying point for the Vendean militia to cross the Loire; the depriving the rebels of their best chiefs, whom death or flight had carried off, was another advantage; and it was a still greater one to have destroyed all the establishments which furnished them with warlike stores (15). Notwithstanding, all this did not

(15) But the greatest perhaps of all the advantages which this succession of victories procured, was the effect produced upon the public opinion by the march of the troops of Mentz; a girdle of fire enveloped the revolted country; fire, terror, (shall I be pardoned for this word?) and death, preceded our column.

The execution of these dreadful and salutary measures ordered by the National Convention, removed from the Vendeans

terminate the war: the mass of banditti was dispersed but not destroyed. The garrison of Mentz had not traversed the third part of their territory; it had passed through a part of la Vendée like a torrent: its march had been constantly victorious; but let us frankly declare, without fearing contradiction from military men who are strangers to all party spirit, even by the officers still attached to the glorious wrecks of that immortal troop, the garrison of Mentz had only made in la Vendée a successful opening. The greatest part of the elements of which the Royalist party was composed still existed; it was necessary to prevent its reassuming the political consistence of which it had been just deprived, and to attain that end, Government, instead of saying to the generals, *finish the war in a month: finish the war*

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deans all those who had secretly favoured them, but who dare not range themselves under their colours; it particularly stopped that moral defection which daily made alarming progress in the neighbouring departments, many inhabitants of which being seduced, and led astray by the emissaries of the Royalist party, began to look upon the Vendean power as a political counter-force, and to be dreaded by the Republic. In displaying the national vengeance against the perfidious Vendée, all the ill-disposed who were scattered about the adjacent country were terrified. It determined all doubtful and neuter persons in favour of the Republic.

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in a fortnight; (16) Government, I say, should consider that it required time, patience, a continuation of operations combined according to those measures which had already been employed with success, in order completely to destroy every root of the Vendean conspiracy.

Charette took advantage of the distance of the Republican troops, in order to take some posts, although indeed of but little importance; but he undertook two expeditions which he hitherto had not dared to attempt. He attacked and took the islands of Bouin and Noirmoutier. This new conquest of the army of Lower Poitou proved that the Council of War at Saumur was wrong in not sending more troops to Canclaux (17), when it was decided that the principal attack should be made by Nantes. Canclaux, obliged to penetrate into the

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(16) As if a general officer who commanded in the West could assign a prefixed term to this war, in the same manner as an officer of engineers, who, with proportionate means of attack, ought always to determine the duration of the resistance of a regularly fortified place.

(17) The Isles of Bouin and Noirmoutier were a great loss to us; but Canclaux cannot be reasonably reproached for the loss of them, not having sufficient troops to spare to guard all his posts and to have at the same time strong columns to oppose the enemy's masses with. Charette likewise was partly indebted to treason for the capture of Noirmoutier. However that may be, we shall see in the last part

bosom of la Vendée with a small force, could not divide it so as sufficiently to strengthen all his posts; so that in advancing into the enemy's country he necessarily left in his rear several points uncovered and defenceless. Moreover, Charette knew not how to profit by a circumstance so favourable; he wished to preserve his two new conquests, without having made himself master of the posts which would secure them to him; and having re-entered le Bocage, he endeavoured to join his army with the ruins of that beaten at Chollet (18).

After this affair of Chollett, (19) the Vendeans, who were not yet accustomed to disasters,

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part of this work of what importance it was to us to be in possession of Noirmoutier; when I retook this island, powerful succours were daily expected from England, which an officer, sent there by general d'Elbée, solicited much to have sent.

(18) He could not attain this object In general, the Vendeans who were attached to the grand army had but little confidence in Charette.

(19) The affair of Chollet happened between the 15th and 16th October (1793, O. S) After this event it was generally believed that all the Vendeans had passed the Loire, and that the army, having been destroyed on the right bank, the Vendean war no longer existed. With a little reflexion, they would not have given credit to these reports, circulated by some perfidious agents, some of whom were desirous of diverting

deprived of their best generals, and of every rallying point, remained for some time dispersed

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diverting the attention of the National Convention from la Vendée, and others, of arrogating to themselves the glory of having terminated this atrocious war. If they had well known the kind of troops which the rebels had, and the habits of the natives of the country, they would not have given credit to these false reports.

It is known, that in general men quit their country with reluctance. The inhabitants of the country parts in particular have more local attachment than those belonging to cities. The inhabitants of Poitou feel more repugnance than other peasants to quit their habitations, either on account of the extreme fertility of their country, their attachment to their estates, or their confidence in their lords and priests; who there, more than any where else, have preserved, and still preserve, their fatal ascendancy. The profound ignorance of the Poictevin, his absurd prejudices, so fortified and rooted, that for several ages he has not advanced one step towards reason, render his existence purely mechanical. He is so fond of home, that even for his own interest, he finds it difficult to *lose sight of his steeple.* It was only the delirium of fanaticism that could carry him far from his cottage in order to fight the enemies of his priests and his king, it was also impossible to keep him under his colours for two or three days; and this is one of the causes, as I shall prove hereafter, which stopped the progress of their victories. In order to keep the Vendean to a campaign, you must always shew him his enemy. If the Vendean generals wished to remain in a town during twenty-four hours, they lost the fourth part of their soldiers. I will cite an instance; when Saumur was taken, the besieging

and concealed, and only shewed themselves when the victorious army had crossed over to the right bank.

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army was about 80,000 men. The chiefs remained a week at Saumur; and this was the greatest error they committed, it was this that saved Nantes; and when they marched against Angers, they had not more than 30,000 men, who were joined by some rebels from the right bank.

But another motive, perhaps more powerful and which seems to be the effect of judgment, causes the Vendeans to quit the woody country with reluctance. He knows that he owes a part of his strength to the nature of the ground, and to the advantages of locality. At home he is the best soldier in Europe; he is no longer the same when out of his country.

Among other contrasts which appear in the character of the Poictevin, there is one truly extraordinary; it will be recollected what I have said concerning the courage of the Vendeans; nevertheless, Poitou was the province of France which furnished the smallest number of soldiers. Few Poictevins engaged themselves, but when it was necessary to defend their political and religious opinions, there were found, as one may say, as many soldiers as there were Vendeans.

The disinclination of the Poictevin to the profession of arms, his aversion to travelling, much more to emigration, his attachment to his priests, (and we must allow that the greatest part of these led an exemplary life, and preserved the patriarchal manners), in fine, the extreme fertility of the soil, these were, I believe, the chief causes of the immense population of this country.

Not

We could then perceive the error of the councils of war held at Saumur, in not having settled

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Not only the true Vendeans had not passed the Loire, but even a part of the troops composed of strangers, and destined to advance upon the right bank, were not able to cross the river. The passage took place on the 17th, 18th and 19th of October, but, on the last day, the Republicans opposed them with advantage, took eleven pieces of cannon from them, and compelled them to return to the left bank in their boats. This event happened at the height of Varade. If the army that crossed the Loire found itself 80,000 strong under the walls of Granville and Angers, it was by the numerous recruits which it raised upon the right bank, and particularly in the environs of Laval, Mayenne, &c. where the public spirit was lost, and where likewise the Prince de Talmont had the greatest influence. I convinced myself at the places where that army passed through of the causes of its progressive increase; I discovered them to be in the voluntary and forced recruiting which it made from Varade, Ancenis, Oudon, and other points upon the shore of the Loire, until its arrival at Laval, where the recruiting was generally spontaneous.

But it was easy to judge that this army could not long exist; that it would disperse itself still more rapidly than it had recruited itself; and that the more it should augment its force by men, the more it would advance its ruin. It had but few warlike stores, and it soon wanted provisions. This multitude famished all in its passage, and famished itself; it could not subsist but by travelling every day into a fresh country, and it must have perished with hunger by re-entering those which it had devastated, as it had devoured every thing upon its passage. The rebels being obliged to walk

the plan for a campaign. That of a general attack being executed, it was necessary to pursue the operations. A new plan then was wanted; or,

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about from town to town, in order to obtain subsistence, the first enterprise they should fail in would bring famine, discouragement, and necessarily desertion, in the army. It also diminished two-thirds (*a*) when it was repulsed at Granville and Angers; and when the Chiefs, despairing (after the affair of Mans), at not being able to pass the Loire at Ancenis, led back the wrecks of the army to Savenay, it consisted only of sixteen or seventeen thousand men, half dead with hunger and misery, and of which the major part was exterminated by the Republicans. The rest dispersed themselves throughout the country, and joined the Chouans, except the cavalry, which repassed by a few at a time to the left bank.

(a) And doubtless the whole of this did not perish by fire or sword; for rational and military men give no credit to these pompous accounts of battles, in which fools kill a prodigious number of the enemy, whilst we lose only ten or a dozen Republicans. At Cholet, for instance, where it was said that the Vendean army had been almost entirely destroyed, the rebels lost three thousand men. They lost but few men at the sieges of Granville and Angers. They had but five thousand killed at the affair of Mans, amongst whom were many women. In fine, at the affair of Savenay, where the Republicans had scarcely any thing to do but to kill, the loss of the enemy was computed at seven or eight thousand men; and I would not answer for it that there were no exaggerations in these reports, always less surprising than that of Westermann. (See the Second Part.)

rather

rather, a previous plan was necessary, in order to profit, without interruption, from the advantages of our victories, and the terror and dispersion of the rebels.

The heart of the grand Catholic and Royal army having passed over to the right bank of the Loire, and increasing itself daily, the Republican army was obliged to pursue it, whilst weak garrisons were left in some of the re-conquered towns, and those which chance had saved from the general conflagration. Some battalions were dispersed at different points, the most advantageously situated, and the least susceptible of defence. All these posts, besides the weakness of their position, had such a small force, that they could not act offensively and engage with the rebels in that state of compression to which our frequent successes had reduced them. All these posts, I say, insulated, and continually threatened by the enemy that surrounded them, and cut off at all points, were unable mutually to support one another, or even to inform each other of their respective dangers. The orders and reports could not be circulated without sacrificing the regulations and exposing the secrets of out operations. In fine, these posts were disposed in haste, and at hazard; and in establishing them, as well as in their formation, neither locality, force, nor the

remaining

remaining resources of the rebels, were considered.

What contributed still more to destroy the union and the harmony between the different fractions of the Republican army left upon the left banks, was the distance of the Staff Officers, who, infatuated with victory, and pursuing the rebels on this side the Loire, at the head of a body of the army, could no longer be the common centre, the only spring of all the operations upon the two banks; so that the General Officers remaining in la Vendée, left to themselves, were obliged to act upon the defensive, at that time very dangerous, for want of plan, orders and forces.

This inertness of the Republicans upon the left bank re-animated the hopes of the rebels, and restored their audacity. They shewed themselves at several points in parties of three, four, and five hundred men. They beat different detachments that were going from one post to another, carried off the patroles, convoys, &c. and every day killed some of the volunteers, who were going to or returning from the hospitals. The Vendeans seemed only to expect the return of their Chiefs, in order to form themselves into bodies. Strong detachments were no where discovered; and their

posts

posts were not sufficiently strong in any place to be held or repressed.

Such was the state of affairs during Brumaire and Frimaire (in the second year), on the territory occupied by the army of Anjou and Upper Poitou, otherwise the grand Catholic and Royalist army. We must, however, observe, their meetings became every day more considerable, on account of the small number and inactivity of the Republican troops.

Charette, after having in vain sought to unite under his command the different dismembered parts of the grand army, over-ran le Bocage, and continued the war with vigour. Several engagements took place, and most of them to his disadvantage; he was successively beaten by Haxo, Dutruy, Dufour, &c. He lost also the Isle of Bouin, which he wished to defend personally, and where he was near being taken.

Whoever has carried on, and is acquainted with war, particularly that of la Vendée, will allow that it was a great fault to abandon the left bank without giving an uniform system of operations to the General Officers left there. We should have profited by the ascendancy which our victories had acquired, to act offensively, and not to leave the banditti at rest for a moment: yet it was precisely under such favourable circumstances,

cumstances, it was from the end of October to the beginning of Nivose, that the most timid defensive measures were observed upon the left bank; so that, with the exception of some towns continually threatened and insulted by the rebels, they were still masters of their territory. Thus, by a continuation of inattention, or rather of fatality, attached to our conduct in the West, we constantly pursued the offensive system when the weakness of our means and the mass of the enemy's forces required us to rest upon the defensive; and, on the contrary, we acted on the defensive when we should have incessantly attacked and pursued the rebels. It seems as though it had been wished to suspend the last blow that would have completed their ruin.

I have related in this Third Part of my Memoirs, the most important events that have occurred in la Vendée since the first of August (1793, O. S.) till the 1st of Nivose, in the second year. I have not spoken of the operations of the respective armies upon the right bank, being foreign to the war of la Vendée, and because they were not true Vendeans who fought on this side the Loire.

The fourth and last Part (20) of the work will

(20) I have not related several affairs which took place in la Vendée, where we fought almost every day, as I wished

contain the time during which I had the command, that is to say, from the 1st Nivose till Floréal following. I shall exclude all prejudice from this account. I shall speak of my disasters as well as my successes. I shall describe my faults and errors, without concealing those of the government, which sometimes were the cause of mine. Government, who was never well acquainted with the war of la Vendée, lessened the effect of the only measures which could terminate it, by its impatience to see it finished. They soon rendered them null, less no doubt by my suspension, than by the total and sudden change of the system, according to which I acted, and which met with its approbation (21).

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wished to speak only of the most interesting facts I have commanded upon some occasions wherein I have been fortunate. Let me be permitted to say, that I had the esteem and confidence of the Representatives of the People then on mission, and of those of my comrades who were enabled to judge of my attachment for the Republic and my profession. I quitted the army on the 21st of September; I returned to it at the end of Frimaire following, in order to take the command.

(21) The government of *that time* had approved of a system of encampment in the West. I took measures to execute it, when the command of the army was taken from me (4th Floréal, in the second year). I know not how the rebels were able, in Fructidor and Vendémiaire following, to acquire

 sufficient

sufficient firmness again so as to obtain several signal victories, and to be able to treat with the Republic; what is astonishing, is, that, when the banditti appeared to resume their career of success, and that in Vendémiaire they gave uneasiness to the National Convention, a decree of arrest was issued forth against me, as though I had then been the General in Chief of the army of the West (and I had commanded at Belle-Isle at sea during five months), whence it follows that I have been arrested for the faults of my successor (supposing the fresh revolt of the rebels ought to be attributed to him) or for those of the government.

The former Committees always appeared to me to attach too little importance to the intestine war, if they occupied themselves seriously concerning the Vendeans, it was only when they had made very great progress, and we have proved how difficult it was to stop them. The Chouans and the rebels of Morbihan have been neglected, however, experience has demonstrated to us the necessity of compressing the revolt from the beginning, if we are desirous that these local and partial insurrections should not acquire stability, and soon form numerous, formidable armies. It is acknowledged, that, in this kind of war, military means alone are insufficient, if not to check the rebels, at least to choak the seeds of the revolt, particularly when its principles are founded upon prejudices, ignorance, and superstition. The party of the Chouans and the Morbihans is not very considerable, and their local situation gives them great advantages in enabling them to secrete themselves. The river of la Vilaine confines the rebels of Morbihan, and serves also to keep the Chouans on that side, whilst la Mayenne can block up the passage on the opposite side, and the Loire cut off all their communications with la Vendée, but if the military force, seconded by these natural advantages, easily represses these robberies, it cannot, alone, destroy the causes of them.

This

This isolated state of the rebels must be considered of importance, if we wish to suppress Chouanry, to calm Morbihan, and deprive the Vendeans of every hope of foreign aid, for, in fine, the immediate presence of an army in each revolted country cannot always continue, and so long as other means are not employed than those which have been hitherto used to terminate these wars (that of la Vendée excepted, the destruction of which has been ordered), so long as a kind of moral regeneration is not produced in this country, the Priests and Nobles not expelled from it, or that they cannot be rendered incapable of conspiring, in fine, so long as we shall be unable to dissipate, by the aid of instruction and public reason, the darkness of ignorance which envelopes these superstitious and fanatic countries, I shall always be apprehensive of a general commotion in the West

These observations are not foreign to the War of la Vendée, with this difference, however, that the rigorous measures which have been taken for the complete destruction of the rebels of the left bank, would have been impolitic upon the right bank. I think they were necessary against the Vendeans; because their first motions were not checked, because they were more seconded by the nature of the ground, because time had been given them to organise themselves; and because they had very able and enterprising chiefs. But if the greatest part of these advantages have been hitherto wanting by the Chouans and the rebels of Morbihan, may they not occur? May not a successor to la Rouerie be found, who, profiting by his plan, his means, and even by his errors, may rekindle a flame hardly extinguished, and renew in Brittany and upon the right bank of the Loire, the fury of the civil war that has desolated the left bank? Will it then be the time to employ other measures than that of military force? and, with these military means, will it again

be necessary to have recourse to the system of devastation adopted in order to reduce the Vendeans, and transform into deserts the richest and finest countries of the Republic? Many people will doubtless find my fears exaggerated; but I believe they will appear to be just to every man who is honest and who has studied the country.

END OF THE THIRD PART.

MEMOIRS

FOR THE

HISTORY

OF THE

WAR OF LA VENDÉE.

PART THE FOURTH.

IT is necessary to have served in la Vendée, in order to form an idea of the fatigue which our troops experience there, the sickness which ensues, and the discouragement and disgust they feel at this kind of War. Ask such of the vanquishers of Gemmappe and Watigny, who have been sent from the banks of the Sambre and the Scheldt to the borders of the Loire; ask them if they have suffered so much during three years in the plains of Belgium, as they have in four months in the hideous retreats of la Vendée.

Ask all military men, all agents in the Western army, with what difficulty and dangers the service

vice there is attended? how much it is shackled by the constituted bodies, and even by the inhabitants residing near the theatre of war; above all, by the perpetual conflict, and sometimes the formal as well as the illegal opposition of those parasitical authorities, produced by anarchy; of those men without any true political character, whose indeterminate powers were a sufficient motive for them to usurp the whole; who, under the name of Commissaries of this or that governing power, caused all the springs of opinion to act according to their pleasure; and, under pretence of forming or nourishing the public spirit, spread insurrection and disorder in the army, by professing therein the doctrine of absolute equality; which is necessarily repugnant to military order. These unruly propagators of the principles of liberty transformed it into licentiousness. Considering themselves the only patriots, they were desirous of having the command; they continually laboured to cause civism to be suspected, and to raise contempt against the General Officers. The least check was always, according to them, a proof of treason or incapability. They unceasingly disapproved, threatened, and denounced; in fine, such was the audacity of these ephemeral rulers, and their confidence in the strength of the connections which attached them

to

to the principal agents of government, that, more than once they were desirous of counterbalancing the power of the representatives on mission and braving their authority. (1)

But the agents which government sent to the armies, were not so dangerous to the general officers in the Western army as the leaders of the pretended popular societies, composed of individuals who, necessarily suffering from the execution of measures ordered by the Convention and its committees, endeavoured to shackle them, and shot forth their arrows against the agents which they dare not direct against government. The denunciations, the libels, and the calumnies, both written and spoken, poured down from all parts upon the military chiefs. They were frequently received by some subalterns of the army, previously disposed to receive and to propagate them, and who, in other respects, had an idea of promotion upon every dismission of a superior. Aristocracy mingled itself in these manœuvres, and could not fail of profiting by them. The

(1) I must except from this account, in other respects perfectly true, the citizen la Chévardière, Commissary of the Department of Paris, and citizens Bessou and Brusley, Commissaries of the Executive Power, whose conduct in la Vendée always appeared to me to be praise worthy.

consti-

constituted bodies (2), animated by the same spirit as the popular societies, excited by the same motives, and having the same interests to defend, laboured towards the same end, and conspired mistrust, resentment, hatred, and vengeance, upon the head of the general. One may judge after this, what was the moral situation of the army: let us see what its physical situation was.

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(2) I shall only relate one trait which will give an idea of the method of proceeding of the authorities in the towns bordering upon la Vendée. Suspended from my functions in the Western army, I took the road from Nantes to Orleans, in order to conform with the law concerning General Officers that are dismissed. I stopped at Saumur to sleep: the next morning, and at the moment I was about to set off again, a corporal, followed by four men, ordered me to follow him to the Revolutionary Committee, at which a physician presided. I judged, from the sullen and severe reception I met with from him, that he was going to treat me as he would his patients He ordered away from me, in the most imperative and indecent tone, my secretary, and one of my aides-de-camp, who was returning to his corps, and after having given me a long and pompous eulogium upon the Revolutionary Committees in general, and particularly upon that at Saumur, he asked me why, on my arrival in that town, I did not present myself to the committee, in order to give an account of my journey and *of my conduct*. I answered the President that I thought it was perfectly regular in shewing my passport to the officer of the post, when I entered Saumur; that I was ready to give him the most exact

The corps of the army which had pursued on this side of the Loire the party of banditti escaped from la Vendée, was composed of a division of the Western army, and of two other divisions detached from the armies of the coasts of Brest and Cherbourg. After the battle of Savenay and the total dispersion of the rebels upon the right bank, these divisions rejoined their respective armies. The troops detached from the Western army were considerably diminished, and weakened with fatigue by the continual and forced marches which they had made for three months: the cavalry was wearied to death, and would have wanted remounting again; the corps

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exact account of my military conduct in the West, and that in the mean time I laid before him a fresh passport which I had received in the night from the Commission at War · (it was the order to go and take upon me the command of Bellisle at sea). At the sight of this new passport the President substituted a tone of mildness for the most acrid forms he had employed in my interrogatory. He observed to me, that it was his duty to conduct himself thus, because an officer dismissed was at least suspected, &c. &c

This Revolutionary Committee took upon itself a few days before to order an Adjutant-General, whom I had stationed at Saumur, to leave the town within 24 hours, which the officer had the weakness to obey. I cannot conceive why, since the beginning of the war, the towns adjacent to la Vendée have not been put in a state of siege.

had scarcely any firmness left; there were some wherein the number of officers and subaltern officers exceeded that of the soldiers; so that one hundred and fifty-seven squadrons, battalions, or regiments, formed scarcely forty thousand men. We must add to these forces a division of nearly ten thousand men sent from the army of the North, much fatigued by the useless marches and counter-marches which they had sustained.

Out of the fifty thousand men of which the Western army consisted, twelve thousand filled the hospitals, the depôts, or were in their own country on leave for recovery. Two thirds of those remaining with their colours were covered with the itch; all were without shoes, part of them had bad guns, and there were not ten thousand bayonets in the army.

These means were no doubt weak, above all on account of the extent of a command which included the whole country from Angoulême to Alençon, and from Rochelle and Nantes to Orleans inclusively. The protection of the coasts and the neighbouring islands was very important; where not only posts of observation were requisite at intervals from the mouth of la Vilaine to that of la Charente, but also considerable

garrisons

garrisons in the Isles of Ré, Oleron, Noirmoutier, &c. &c.

If it were difficult to employ all the branches of such a colossal command to a good effect, it was not less so to guard all its interior parts from the partial or united incursions of the rebels, as a few fortifications erected upon the coasts excepted, it presented not throughout its immense extent any point of support, post, or fortified town.

The Western army, although victorious, had never been so near its total disorganization as at the moment when I took the command. We were in a season of repose, and the troops stood much in need of it; but it was necessary to act; for if we had not taken the advantage of our ascendancy over the rebels they would have again assumed a dangerous firmness and counterbalanced our successes upon the return of fine weather.

The disorder which pervaded the Western army (3) and the want of harmony in its opera-

(3) There never has been order or subordination in this army. I thought that I had discovered the causes, in pillage and the manner in which it was formed. I began to restore discipline in it, and I found more ease in doing it than any other person, for at the time I took the command there was scarcely any thing more to pillage in la Vendée.

tions was less owing (although it had been said) to the indifference or ignorance of some generals in chief, than to their frequent change (4), the kind of war they carried on, and, above all, to the local inconveniences. The younger Marceau, who had commanded *ad interim*, and who shewed great talents (5) had not time to comprehend the whole of it: incessantly pursuing the rebels upon the right bank, he neglected the left, and was not able to give all the Western forces that union, that pointedness, if I may so express myself, which belongs to discipline and the proper organization of an army. In this situation every thing was to be established in the Western army, and doubtless it was impossible to organise and discipline whilst carrying on the war, and above all a war of movement: but let us again continue the military operations in la Vendée.

On my arrival in the West my first object was to go and concert with the general in chief of

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(4) In three months there were three generals in chief, and three intermediate ones.

(5) This eulogium cannot be suspected, for I know that general Marceau, now employed in the army of the Sambre and the Meuse, sought to injure me in the opinion of several of our brethren in arms. There is but little generosity in acting thus with a man who is in chains: in such a situation quarrels should at least be postponed.

the

the army of the coasts of Brest, in order to produce a coincidence in our measures against the Chouans, recruited from the ruins of the army beaten at Savenay; the territory which they occupied being partly comprised within the command of the coasts of Brest. The result of our interview was, that I should undertake to confine these rebels in the center of the country where they exercised their depredations, that is to say, in the environs of Château-Briand, Château-Gontier, Segré, &c. and to drive them from the banks of the Loire, in order that they might not be able to communicate with the Vendeans. The general in chief of the army of the coasts of Brest was to guard the right bank of the Vilaine, in order to prevent them from penetrating into le Morbihan; he was also to employ a division of his army to clear the forests of le Pertre and la Guerche, their chief retreats, and where the origin of their most numerous meetings still existed. My operations upon the right bank being determined on, I went immediately to Nantes, and afterwards upon the coasts lying near Noirmoutier, in order to attack that island, which it was very dangerous to suffer the Vendeans to occupy any longer.

Preparations had been made for a month in order to attack Noirmoutier. The minister of war

war intimated to me his impatience to see us masters of it, even before my arrival at the army. I felt myself the necessity of undertaking this expedition without delay, in order to deprive the rebels of the hope of obtaining succours from England. General Haxo, who had prepared it, had but a small force and was fearful of being disturbed in his rear by Charette, whenever he should attempt a descent. General Carpentier received orders to occupy Challans, to observe the movements of Charette, and to prevent him from cutting off the troops destined for the attack of Noirmoutier.(6)

In the mean time I learnt at Beauvoir, on the evening preceding the day on which I was to attack Noirmoutier, that Charette had entered Machecoul, at the head of six thousand chosen men ; that he was to be joined there by Cathelinière, and that they were to proceed, united, to the relief of the threatened island. They could avoid general Carpentier in passing by Châteauneuf, and attack us at la Crouillière and la Barre-du-Mont, at the moment of our embarkation. General Haxo judged that the expedition ought

(6) The dispositions for the attack and descent in the island are due to generals Haxo and Dutruy.

to

to be deferred (7); I, on the contrary, thought it might be a reason for accelerating it, if it had not been fixed for the next day. Carpentier, according to my orders, attacked Charette at Machecoul, previous to his junction with Cathelinière, and we marched against Noirmoutier.

We had scarcely three thousand men, but they were all light troops. No artillery had been sent over, and it was absolutely necessary the island and town of Noirmoutier should be taken in the course of the day. The greatest difficulty was not in effecting a descent, which, in effect, cost us only ten or twelve men, and a few wounded, but in carrying the town defended by eighteen hundred men, and upwards of twenty pieces of cannon; and above all by its position in the midst of salt pits, which render all its avenues narrow and difficult. The impossibility of spreading the army in a country so intersected and where one can only march by the flank, made us increase the number of our columns; and, favoured by some small hills, which did not admit of the enemy discovering their weakness, we appeared to them to be in considerable force: they were in order

(7) Haxo was right. It was great imprudence to attack the isle of Noirmoutier with so small a force: it was relying too much upon fortune.

of battle under the walls of the town. I saw some uncertainty in their motions; they demanded a parley; we advanced; and after having passed the first batteries, I summoned the rebels to surrender at discretion, and we entered the town. I learnt in the night that Charette, beaten at Machecoul by general Carpentier, had been obliged to quit the coasts and to re-enter le Bocage.

I took several prisoners of distinction in the island of Noirmoutier: d'Hauterive, Vieilland, and some other chiefs, and the famous d'Elbée, Generalissimo of all the forces beyond the Loire, confined in his bed by a mortal wound. The cowardly conduct of the garrison, which abandoned the lines without firing a gun, embittered his last moments.

The conference which I had with this chief of the Royalist party concerning the political situation of the rebels, their means, their resources, the foreign succours they might expect, &c. &c. determined the greatest part of my ulterior operations; and what that general officer (8) told me was confirmed in part by a considerable num-

(8) Let it not be imagined that d'Elbée gave me all the information he could have communicated. "You do "not intend, General," said he in answer to my first question, "to obtain from me all the secrets of my party? as to "the

ber of prisoners, and particularly by the Chevalier de la Cathelinière, one of Charette's lieutenants, who fell into my hands two months after the taking of Noirmoutier.

" the rest I believe it is lost "—You have still a great number of men —" Of what use is it to have soldiers where there " are no chiefs nor ammunition.—We have been very ill se- " conded by the gentlemen of Britanny.—There was only " one man there capable of great things "—Of whom then do you speak ?—" Of Monsieur de la Royerie."—You expected succours from England ?—" I sent an officer there a " week ago : he will return too late "—You have already received some, no doubt, since the beginning of the war ? —" No, we did not want foreign aid to re-establish the " throne, to restore to the clergy all their privileges, and to " the nobility all their rights. We alone could have re- " stored to the kingdom all its splendor ; the interior of " France offered us sufficient resources to execute these glo- " rious designs ; but having miscarried before Nantes it was " necessary to abandon the project of carrying on the war " upon the right bank of the Loire —We were to have di- " rected our operations towards the South, and this was " always my advice in the Supreme Council. We have lost " ourselves ; it is our disunion which has caused you to " triumph. The Bretons were to have made a powerful " diversion, and there has been nothing but uncertainty and " weakness in their motions. Messieurs d'Autichamp and " Talmont wished to repass the Loire, the first, to seize " upon a sea-port or to march against Paris ; the second, to " establish himself in what he called his estates of Laval, " to become the chief of a party : these projects were ex " travagant. It is the ambition of these two general officers

I learnt in this island that Stofflet and Laroche-Jacquelin, who had followed the Prince de Talmont on this side the Loire, had repassed to the left bank; that after an interview which had taken place in Noirmoutier between Charette and Laroche-Jacquelin before d'Elbée when dying, (who exhorted them to join each other in order to raise up the party again, whose disunion and that of the other general officers had accelerated its ruin) these two chiefs separated, being discontented with each other, and disposed more than ever to divide their operations. I was informed that Laroche-Jacquelin aided by Stofflet and Bernard de Marigny, travelled through all the country occupied by the ruins of the grand Catholic army, in order to reorganize it; that they only waited for the return of fine weather, and particularly the warlike stores which England gave them reason to hope for, and those which their new establishments were to produce, in order to attack in a mass our posts dis-

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" which has caused all our disasters; it is that of M. de " Charette, his ignorance, his obstinacy in secluding him- " self and separating his operations from those of the grand " army, which have caused our most important expeditions " to fail, and, to compleat our misfortunes, we lost at " Chollet the brave M. de Bonchamp, the best officer of the " army, &c. &c."

persed

persed in the center of la Vendée; that during winter they confined their efforts to a petty warfare, and only employed themselves in cutting off the communications between these posts, in seizing upon our parties, our patroles, our escorts, our convoys, and particularly our warlike stores.

This war of chicanery was what suited us the least, all circumstances considered. It was, however, what was carried on during three months, and what restored the audacity and the hopes of the rebels.

The daily reports which reached me from all quarters, and those from a great number of prisoners, all agreeing, (those even of spies whom I tried in the employment without hopes of reaping any advantage), confirmed every thing that d'Elbée had told me, and what he had caused me to presume by his refusal to answer certain questions which I put to him concerning the interior situation of la Vendée. I learned, moreover, that the rebels carried on the war like desperados, and with an atrocity unexampled in the history of the most ferocious people. The Republicans, whether soldiers or not, who fell into their hands, finished their lives in dreadful and prolonged tortures. Every torment that the most ingenious barbarity could invent was executed in the name of the Catholic Religion and Louis the

Seventeenth, and more frequently executed by women upon the prisoners of war, and indiscriminately upon all persons who remained faithful to the Republic.

The blind and incurable attachment of the rebels to their chiefs and their priests; the connections and intelligence which the latter kept up in the country bordering upon the theatre of war; the ravages they made in the public opinion by the effect of their proclamations, profusely circulated; their plots, so well woven and so ably combined, that they were not known till it was too late to counteract them; the fresh movements which they excited in le Morbihan and among the rebels on the right bank of the Loire, whose succours and union they urged; the recent passage of several detachments of cavalry, who, having abandoned the Chouans, daily and in small parties, rejoined the assemblies on the left bank, by the imprudence of the Commanders at Saumur, Angers, &c. &c.; some checks which we had just experienced in different affairs of posts, which took place within the circumference of the grand Catholic army; the experience of events which had assigned such dreadful qualities to this horrid war; the fear of seeing them renewed whilst the greatest part of the instruments of the revolt still existed, and afforded to an able

chief

chief (the least delay to whom would have enabled him to re-assemble them) every means of giving again that intenseness to the Royalist party which it had lost, and which had long rendered it so formidable; the firmness preserved by the army of Charette, who, truly carrying on the war like a robber, had never compressed the whole of his forces in a general engagement, on which thirty successive defeats had scarcely made any impression, over which, in fine, we had not acquired, nor have yet been able to acquire, that ascendancy which bloody and long-disputed victories produce, the infallible result of which is to remove from and deprive the conquered enemy of every kind of resource; the succours which the enemy expected from England, and which, in spite of all the precautions taken to intercept them, might reach them by the least negligence in the service upon the coasts, by the effect of the least fortuitous event, which sometimes renders the wisest dispositions useless, and which all human prudence cannot foresee; finally, a thousand particular and local circumstances, difficult to be well explained, and which perhaps could not be comprehended, nor even perceived, but by those who have a perfect knowledge of the country: —these are the result of the information which I had collected, and the fruit of my observations upon

upon the War of la Vendée, which I had studied from its commencement. As to my instructions, I drew them from several decrees of the Convention, divers resolutions of the Committees of government, and those of the Representatives on mission in the West; I could even have received them from the example of my predecessors, who had carried fire and death into the revolted country, particularly from those who commanded the garrison of Mentz. The government was silent respecting the proposition I made to it to try gentle means, and, by publishing a proclamation for an amnesty, to make the rebels hope for pardon, who would have spontaneously surrendered and laid down their arms. This measure at that time would have infallibly succeeded with the compressed Chouans, who were frightened at the recent sight of several dreadful engagements, which had happened upon their territory, and after which the banditti had been *pursued without intermission, and exterminated without quarter* (9).

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(9) In the terms of a decree of the Convention. See in the Journals of that time the different decrees of the Convention, and the resolutions of its Committees, relative to la Vendée: those of the Deputies on mission were conformable thereto. What then is the cause of that inconceivable fury with which the agents and *very passive* executors of the will of government are pursued? You have substituted mild measures

The government, by its disapprobation of every system of indulgence, and which the decrees of

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measures for the dreadful means which you thought it necessary to employ to put an end to the War; it is well and good: but acknowledge at least that you wished the entire destruction of la Vendée; and do not persecute your agents which the least refusal—what do I say? the least negligence, conducted to the scaffold. *See the constitutive law of the Revolutionary Government.* What can have been the object of government (this work was written in Nivôse, in the third year) in suffering the organisation of a system of defamation and persecution against the General Officers which have served in la Vendée? (There nevertheless are some who have been excepted from the proscription by an *entirely peculiar* favour). Was it to offer motives of consolation to the rebels, in expiating by the commanders under government, by the forced agents of the sovereign will, the inseparable excesses of civil wars, particularly the most horrid war that ever existed? excesses which, whatever may be said of them, have been uncommon; excesses which authorised the soldier to make use of the dreadful but universally acknowledged right, the right of reprisal; excesses to which our volunteers were incessantly provoked and excited by the spectacle presented by the interior of la Vendée, where they found, as one may say, at every step, the bodies of their armed brethren who had been tortured, mangled, torn to pieces, or burnt by a slow fire, or hung up to the trees by the feet, or buried alive, &c., excesses, in fine, which must necessarily have produced the violent measures that were ordered, reiteratedly ordered, incessantly ordered, by the National Convention, its Committees, and the Deputies on mission in the West. Was it wished,

the Convention effectively resisted, left no doubt concerning its intentions, already fully declared,

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wished, in imputing pretended horrors to the Generals, that the true, well-known, completely proved horrors committed in la Vendée, all those atrocities of which the pride of human barbarity offers no example, but which are now considered as venial offences, as the *errors of these good men*, should be forgotten? If, not content with rebuilding their houses, furnishing them with cattle and aratory instruments, lavishing our gold and assignats in order to engage them not to receive the proffered amnesty, but to consent to treat with us as one power would with another, if, I say, it has been judged that, for the more ample indemnity, the complete satisfaction, the reparation so legitimately due to the illustrious defenders of the Altar and the Throne, to their generous disciples, to all these *erroneous* men who have (and it is no longer doubtful) taken arms against the Republic only to support themselves against the system of terror, which lay heavily on France; if it has been judged that, in order to leave nothing more to be expected by these new Republicans in general, and particularly by the *Patriots* Stofflet, Charette and Company, it was necessary, and above all things just, to drag through the mud, and to cover with opprobrium and public contempt (whilst expecting something better) the General Officers who have fought against them, Officers whose patriotism is of earlier date, and who have not ceased to give proofs of it since the commencement of the Revolution, soldiers of liberty, who defended it by sacrificing their fortunes, their repose, their dearest affections, who, particularly during these four years past, constantly sought for the most dangerous posts, in order to seal the triumph of the Republic with their

of completely destroying by fire and sword the roots of the conspiracy in the West, and to continue the War to the utmost extremity, in order to attain the end; also, although they gave me neither plan nor instructions, which I continually solicited, they sanctioned all my measures, which, besides, had been approved by the Representatives with the army.

After these considerations, and a due examination of the only military measures which could be employed in la Vendée, in combining them with the nature of the ground, the local obstacles, the manner of fighting of the Vendeans, their audacity, and their strength, the following were the basis of my general plan; the object of which was to deprive the rebels of every kind of resource both of warlike stores and provisions, and to leave them only the choice of death in the centre of the revolted country, by strongly occupying the chief points of its circumference.

1°. To prevent the Vendeans receiving any foreign aid.

2°. To cut off all their communications with the Chouans and the banditti of le Marais.

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their blood, &c. &c.; certainly one must give up every idea of justice and reason, if we find either the one or the other in this conduct of government.

3°. To remove from the revolted country all those of its inhabitants who had not taken up arms; because some, under the appearance of neutrality, secretly favoured the banditti; and others, who formed the smallest part, although faithful to the Republic, furnished them also with aid, which they could not refuse from compulsion (10).

4°. To carry off the cattle, corn, and every article of subsistence, from the interior of la Vendée, and to evacuate all the posts there (11).

5°. To destroy the retreats of the banditti, and in general all places which could afford them an asylum and resource.

6°. To encircle the whole theatre of war upon the left bank of the Loire; first, by posts placed upon the principal points of its circumference; afterwards, and upon the return of fine weather, by entrenched camps.

7°. To over-run, in every sense, la Vendée, by columns which should incessantly pursue the

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(10) The remaining inhabitants of la Vendée, under pretence of neutrality, wore alternately the white and tri-coloured cockade. They came before our columns with a tri-coloured flag, and before the rebels with a white one.

(11) The carriages and carts of the country must be understood here supplying their assistance.

rebels,

rebels, destroy their retreats, and protect the carrying off the articles of subsistence.

8°. To occupy and fortify St. Florent (now Mont-Glône) situated upon the Loire in the center of its diameter, where the acting columns would always find provisions, and, in case of ill success, a retreat and a point of support, which likewise by its situation upon the river would protect its navigation, and receive by that means every thing necessary to supply the wants of its garrison and the different corps of the army which might approach its walls in consequence of their operations,

9°, To attach no kind of artillery to the columns, nor camping effects, military equipage, baggage, &c. &c.(12)

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(12) This was an indispensable measure and to which they will be obliged to return, if the war be not terminated by gentle means. Moreover, I should have reason to be astonished (if one can now be astonished at any thing,) at the knavery introduced in the greatest part of the denunciations directed against me in the sitting of the 8th Vendémiaire, in the year 2. I am accused of having set fire to la Vendée. I shall answer by a dilemma, the solution of which will exhibit my entire disculpation to every good logician You either did or did not order la Vendee to be burnt. In the first case you doubtless will not punish the agent of your will, to whom it was so dangerous not to execute it literally in the other case, you cannot yet rea-

 sonably

10°. To remove the magazines, and even the *depôts*, from all the posts of the first and second line.

11°. Frequently to change the troops of the columns by those of the garrisons or cantonments.

12°. Never to transmit orders nor reports by the interior of la Vendée.

13°. To establish upon the Loire in the middle of its stream from Angers to Nantes twenty-

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sonably accuse me, for I have constantly acted under the eyes of the Representatives of the People on mission. Their presence had doubtless been a sufficient sanction for my operations. Nay more, they approved in writing the general order of the 30th Nivôse, of which all the others were only the consequence. Still farther, which is, that I am accused of having burnt la Vendée, and, amongst all the Generals who commanded after the decree of the 1st of August, I am the person who burnt the least. It was not me that burnt Legé, Machecoul, Clisson, le Port Sainper, Montaigu, Beaupreau, Mortagne, Vihiers, Maulevrier, Châtillon, S. Fulgens, &c &c —I will add that I was the first to stop the conflagration, when I judged that the rebels were sufficiently weakened, so that the war might be terminated without employing these measures. It has been said that to burn la Vendée was organising want, it having been always considered as the granary of the Western coasts this merits explanation. La Vendée, properly so called, or rather what ought to be called *la Vendée*, the woody country, is, for the major part, composed of woods, vine-yards, and meadows.

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four gun boats, in order to watch, protect the navigation, inspect, and visit the vessels passing up and down the river, particularly those which might pass from one side to the other.

14°. To change at least twice a year all the troops of the Western army, with those of the coasts of Brest and Cherbourg, and never to change the general officers belonging to them.(13)

15°. To disarm all the Communes near the theatre of war, as the enemy might make fresh incursions there, snatch from the patriots their arms and ammunition, or receive both from those of the inhabitants attached to the Royalist party.

The first part of this general system of operations in the West, consisted in the establishment of cantonments upon the right bank, disposed so as to keep the Chouans within bounds, to prevent them from making any diversion, and from at-

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It is not le Bocage which produces the most corn, but the immense plains that surround it · it is the extensive fields of le Marais, Luçon, Fontenay, Niort, Thouars, Doué, &c. whose rich productions feed twenty departments. Let us not then make the evil greater than it is, and let us endeavour to speak of la Vendée without passion.

(13) The motives for this disposition are the disgust and fatigue experienced by our volunteers in this kind of war.

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tempting any auxiliary movement whilst we were fighting the Vendeans.

The second, to take the same measures against the banditti of le Marais, who, not being separated from the Vendeans by any natural obstacle; might receive assistance from them, or join the army of Charette.

The third, in the simultaneous eruption of twelve columns upon the territory occupied by the ruins of the grand Catholic army, then divided into three circles.(14)

The fourth, in the marches and particular operations against Charette.

The fifth, in the execution of a plan of a general attack upon le Marais.

The sixth, in the establishment of intrenched camps.

This general plan (15), this project which contains several branches, and of which I only give

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(14) Commanded by Stofflet, Bernard de Marigny, and la Roche-Jacquelin; the latter was killed at the end of Pluviôse; and then there were only two armies in that part, that of Anjou and Upper Poitou, conducted by Stofflet, and that of the center commanded by Bernard de Marigny.

(15) Among other difficulties which the execution of all military plans meets with in la Vendée, and of which one may judge from the local dispositions and the kind of war carried on by the rebels, there is one which is invincible, and which singularly retarded our operations. Whenever

you

an analysis, considered in all its relations, appeared to me capable of terminating the War of la Vendée; and although I could not but observe the obstacles thrown in the way by all those whose interests it offended, and who however ought to have concurred in its execution, I judged that the indifference of some, their unwillingness to second me, and the secret means of opposition and the inertness of others, and the secret manœuvres also of some who were not entirely strangers to the revolt, might retard the effect of my measures but not render them fruitless. Thus, in spite of the dreadful coalition of the departments, districts, municipalities, societies *called popular*, tribunals, commissions, committees, &c. &c.; in fine, the thousand authorities which, first individually and then collectively inveighed against me; in spite of the

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you were desirous of sending an order from the head quarters to a division at the distance of twelve or fifteen leagues, the messenger was often obliged to travel fifty or sixty, in order to avoid passing through the revolted country. Thence the impossibility of attempting expeditions which circumstances may give birth to, but which ought to be undertaken without delay. The rebels appear one day at a point to the number of five or six thousand men: you concert an attack for the next day, and they are eight or ten leagues distant from the place where they shewed themselves the day before.

two thousand written denunciations(16), their reproaches, and their clamours at the tribune and in the streets; in spite of the use of all the means of discordance which they sought to excite among the troops,(17) but the progress of which a severe repression would soon have stopped; in spite of the hundred thousand physical and moral obstacles which the locality, the rebels and their accomplices, and that crowd of men and corporations united in order to ruin me, opposed against the execution of my plan, I changed not

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(16) I was assured of it by a Representative of the People.

(17) At Luçon, the popular society went so far as to cause all the troops of the division to revolt against the general officer that commanded there, and to concert with the municipality to cause him to be arrested by an Adjutant-General. A Captain of Infantry was also arrested, against whom no other reproach could be made than having executed the General's orders, and who was no less traduced for it at Fontenay, and guillotined immediately. It would be too long to relate here all the facts which evidently prove the counter-revolutionary conduct of the established authorities; but here is an observation which I have made, and which doubtless cannot have escaped the Representatives of the People, who have traversed the Western Departments. Who was the leader of a popular society? one who had formerly been a priest. Who was the principal actor in administration? One who had formerly been a priest. Who presided or influenced a Committee? One who had formerly been a priest, &c. &c.

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the least disposition in it; and I effaced not a syllable of my superior orders, or those sanctioned by the first authorities.

Master of Noirmoutier, and easy concerning the safety of the coasts, I fixed my cantonments upon the right bank of the Loire; I was particularly attentive to render the roads free and secure,(18) so that my orders might be speedily circulated; and that the secret of our operations might not be exposed, I entrusted the command of this party to young de Lâge, adjudant-general, an officer of great talents and activity. I could be equally easy respecting any movements which Charette might make in le Marais, the approaches to which were defended by the posts of Challans and Machecoul, commanded by generals Haxo and Dutruy. Thus, I thought of nothing more than the execution of the third part of my general plan; that is to say, the combined march of twelve columns, composed of about fifteen thousand men of the best and least fatigued troops.

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(18) I can affirm, and, if it were necessary I could easily prove, that during the time I commanded the Western army, the travelling upon the roads was free and without danger from Nantes to Rennes, from Nantes to Angers, from Angers to Mans, &c &c. I know not if travellers can pass there now (15th Messidor in the year 3,) with the same security.

The concurrence of all the civil authorities, of all the authorities adjacent to the revolted country, was indispensable towards the execution of this plan, and above all to accelerate its success. Also, the general order of the 30th Nivôse, in virtue of which the columns put themselves in motion, was preceded by a resolution of the representative of the people la Planche, who ordered all the administrative bodies to carry off all the provisions, (19) and which afforded

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(19) There was an immense quantity of provisions in la Vendée, because all the productions of the country had been retained in it since the year 1790. The principal landholders, the greatest part of whom were at the head of the insurrection, required not the amount of their rents from their farmers, and easily engaged them to preserve the fruits of their harvests. The Vendean, who, like all country people, loves not paper money, preferred keeping his wines, corn, and cattle, rather than barter them for assignats, which he had been taught to discredit. All exterior commerce has ceased in la Vendée since the beginning of the year 1791. I have these details, and many others, from several persons who carried on considerable business in Poitou, and who were obliged to renounce all commercial connexions with the Poitevins when the metallic currency disappeared.

What must be the result of this monopoly of provisions in the revolted countries? The Vendeans had abundance, and their neighbours were in want. This single circumstance has made a great number of proselytes to the Royalist party.

them

them the greatest latitude respecting the choice of the means to be employed, in order that it might be speedily executed, and that they might take advantage of the protection of the marching columns, to execute it in safety: but this measure wounded all private interests; and although it might be salutary and still more urgent, as all the country bordering upon the rivers and forests in la Vendée already began to feel the scarcity, yet they endeavoured to elude it in order to weaken all the others, they pretended there was danger, they excused themselves by the want of carriages,(20) they deliberated, and they gained time; in fine, however imperative the circular order of the representative of the people might be, it was but very imperfectly executed; and if I happened to get any provisions from la Vendée, it was solely owing to the care of the commissary of provisions for the army.

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(20) I passed at the beginning of Germinal by la Motte-Achard, a small borough in the district des Sables. I asked the Mayor of that Commune if, conformably to various resolutions of the Representatives of the People, he had carried off and conducted any corn to les Sables? he answered that he had not been able to do it for want of carriages — Three hours after there were upwards of sixty carts to carry off the goods of the inhabitants who evacuated the place.

In the mean time I could not delay the march of the troops. All the commanders of the posts in the interior communicated to me their uneasiness at the reassembling of the banditti, who became every day more numerous since the return of their chiefs. We had had several engagements during Frimaire and Nivôse, of little importance indeed, but in which the rebels had had sometimes the advantage, particularly against the adjudant-general Desmarcs, whose cowardice led him to the scaffold.

The columns, already disposed at different places in the East for this general and offensive movement, entered into la Vendée, according to the order above stated. I shall give some details in order to prove that this order of march ought not to have taken place until they had reached the heights of Chollet; that is to say, that the columns ought to have passed through about half the revolted country only, and not to have preserved their first disposition on entering the other part of la Vendée, for it was to be presumed that the rebels, being hard pressed, and consequently approached again by these various corps of the army who drove them from every point where they wished to make resistance, would present themselves in certain masses, which it might have been dangerous to have fallen upon with

with such weak columns; that, in other respects, if I had passed beyond the heights of Chollet, in continuing the same order of march, the left columns soon entering upon the territory occupied by Charette's army, whose forces were considerable and united, might have been easily broken, on account of their instability.

But, well informed that the rebels, being scattered, appeared on this side Chollet in partial assemblies only, I thought it right to take advantage of this circumstance to destroy them separately. It was not necessary to oppose the enemy in masses, who had none in these parts themselves, because this disposition would have been more profound, and would have employed a force at that time useless to the columns; because it might have diminished the number of them, and have increased the spaces which separated them too much; and that in taking from them that connection, that adherence which they ought to have according to the general order, it might have rendered it more easy for the rebels to have avoided them, by passing through the interstices, or by considerably expanding those which formed the wings. Thus it was necessary that the march of the twelve columns should be a kind of march in front, and that, by their respective flank companies crossing at intervals, it might

might produce the effect of a march in order of battle. It was not necessary that these columns, thus directed, should act very forcibly, as they had no strong points of resistance to vanquish, and were not likely to meet any parties of more than four, five, or six hundred of the banditti to act against; but that they should make an extensive opening, and encircle a considerable extent of ground, as the banditti were in all parts.

The two central columns directed their march against Chollet, and were to remain there. Those on each flank advancing in parallels to nearly an equal distance from each other, and determined by the general order, were also to stop at different points above the town, the line of which was ordered not to be passed.

According to the information obtained by the parties, the patroles, the discoveries, the reports of the chiefs of the columns, and a considerable number of prisoners, this march produced the expected effect, of making known the real state of the two corps of the army formed from the wrecks of the grand Catholic army; the one under the command of Bernard de Marigny, which was called the central army; the other, commanded by Stofflet, and which preserved the name of the army of Anjou and Upper Poitou. Some of the enemy's detachments which had endeavoured

deavoured to pass upon our rear, were dispersed, and a great number of rebels fell on all sides by the sword of the Republicans; but more considerable meetings were formed in front of the columns, and it would have been dangerous to have attacked them without bringing our forces closer together.

It was then that Laroche-Jacquelin, at the head of 1200 men, passed between two of the columns on the right, which he did not dare to attack, and fell upon Chemillé, the garrison of which being but weak, were, according to the general order, to join the body of the army which had passed through that town, which I wished to evacuate, and which the commander cowardly abandoned without firing a gun.

Laroche-Jacquelin, in falling upon my rear, wished to make a diversion, but his march made no alteration in the continuance of my operations; and in quitting Chollet, where I left a very strong garrison under the command of a general of brigade, I prepared to attack two points where, according to every information, I should find the enemy in force, between Tiffanges and Gesté.

General Cordellier, at the head of the two united columns on the right, marched against Gesté, and I advanced against Tiffanges with the two central columns. The enemy had only three or four hundred men at Tiffanges, who

evacuated it after some discharges of musketry, which we answered by a dozen from an howitzer (21); but Cordellier meeting with some resistance in the neighbourhood of Gesté, had three serious actions with the rebels, in which he beat them, and received orders to pursue them.

In the mean time, the whole of the army suffered from my absence. It was necessary for me to fix my head-quarters (22): Nantes afforded every advantage for the free circulation of orders and intelligence upon both banks; but I found myself at too great a distance from the columns acting in la Vendée, where the operations required the greatest activity. I thought to accomplish both objects, by leaving the Chief of the General Staff at Nantes, and fixing myself at

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(21) This is the only time that I carried artillery into la Vendée. I had an howitzer and an eight pounder. Whoever is acquainted with Tiffanges, knows that it is very difficult to be taken on the side of Chollet.

(22) This is also one of the difficulties experienced by the General in Chief of the forces of the West. I left the Chief of the Staff at Nantes, which was the centre of the correspondence, and where the Representatives of the People were, and I was always at Montaigu or on the march; but one may judge how many inconveniences and delays resulted from the distance of my Chief of the Staff, &c. &c. The mode of carrying on war in la Vendée resembles not, in any respect whatever, that which is carried on upon the frontiers.

Montaigu,

Montaigu, a town which had been burnt at an improper time, as its castle might have preserved and rendered it a very important and secure post, although *en flèche*.

It may be perceived that I had already experienced obstacles in the execution of the third part of my general plan. It has been seen that I stopped my left columns above Chollet, where I left them inactive: they were then to form two corps of the army, and to attack Charette by the East, whilst two other considerable columns were to attack him by the West: but this combined march could not be effected without evacuating the posts of the interior, particularly Chollet, the most dangerous of all, which was to be preserved, conformable to a decree of the National Convention, and the Representatives with the army opposed its evacuation. Its preservation required that of several adjacent posts, such as Mortagne, Tiffanges, &c. and I then found myself under the necessity of placing in these garrisons a part of the troops which I had destined to act offensively. It must be observed, that, in obliging me to guard all these interior posts, I had scarcely ten thousand men left to form the acting columns.

Charette, so often defeated in Frimaire and Nivôse, by Generals Haxo, Carpentier, Dutruy,

Dufour, &c. continued at the extremity of le Bocage. General Duquesnoy, to whom I gave some light troops, received orders to go in quest of him (23), and to pursue him. Charette, in avoiding him, fell upon Legé, the advanced post of Haxo, carried it, and abandoned it immediately after. He was overtaken at two leagues from thence, at Pont-James; and, being compelled to give battle, was vanquished, and lost 800 men, and conducted the wrecks of his army back again into the retreats of le Bocage.

Whilst General Duquesnoy pursued and fought Charette, Chollet was threatened. The General of Brigade, Moulins, jun. whom I had placed there with 5000 chosen men, and three four pounders, knew the projects of Stofflet (24),

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(23) It was not an easy matter to find Charette, particularly to bring him to action. To day at the head of ten thousand men, the next day wandering with a score horsemen, it is very rare that one can come up with him. When you believe him to be in your front, he is in your rear. Yesterday he threatened such or such post, to-day he is ten leagues from it. More able to avoid than fight you, he almost always disconcerts, and often without knowing it, all your combinations He endeavours to surprise you, to carry off your patroles, and to kill your stragglers, &c. &c. This Chief has neither the necessary talents nor audacity to make conquests; but it will be difficult to destroy him.

(24) Stofflet, formerly game-keeper to the Marquis de Maulévrier, is better skilled in military affairs than Charette.

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who, having united to his army the wrecks of that defeated at Gesté, under the command of Laroche-Jacquelin (who was killed four days after that affair), prepared to attack Chollet. Moulins, previously knowing it, was very easy concerning the event. I was not so; and whatever might be my confidence in this General Officer, in the one that seconded him (25), and in the strength of the garrison of that town, the position of it was so bad, the rebels preserved so much intelligence with it, and were so well informed of every thing that passed there, that I dreaded an action under its walls. I felt that Chollet, to which, no doubt, by far too much importance was attached, and the voluntary evacuation of which might rather produce a good effect than otherwise, under every consideration, would do us much mischief in the public opinion, if we were compelled to surrender it by force of arms; and this was a sufficiently powerful motive to engage the rebel chiefs to attack it, and to

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One hundred and fifty actions have much habituated him to war; and he very seldom refuses to fight, in endeavouring to secure to himself the advantages of an attack. His army is more warlike and better commanded than that of Charette.

(25) Caffin, General of Brigade, who was wounded in this affair.

unite all their efforts to render themselves masters of it.

I gave orders to Cordellier, who had not quitted the environs of Gesté since the victory gained by him there, immediately to draw near Chollet with his division, in order that I might be ready to support him. Being arrived within half a league of the town, Cordellier found all the garrison retreating upon the high road of Nantes. He could scarcely manage to make his way through the fugitives, in order to get at their pursuers. The action began: the rebels, who thought themselves certain of victory, were broken in their turn by a vigorous charge, were severely handled in Chollet, the houses of which were already filled with a part of their army, and were pursued to the distance of two leagues by our light troops.

After having restored the garrison of Chollet, and named a successor to the unfortunate Moulins (26), who was not able to survive his defeat,

(26) Moulins enraged at the cowardice of his troops, who had taken flight at the first discharge of musketry, was making every exertion to rally them, when he was struck by a couple of balls. Fearful of falling into the hands of the banditti, he blew out his brains. Thus he terminated his glorious career, carrying with him to the grave the regret and esteem of all the heroes of the army; and covering with shame and opprobrium the cowards that had abandoned him.

I recalled Cordellier to Montaigu, and rejoined, with his division, that of General Duquesnoy, who was continually at the heels of Charette, then occupying the small and great Luc. I marched in order to attack him there, when I learned that he was in my rear at Saint-Philbert-de-Boué; a rapid counter-march brought me near him, and I was going to force him to action in St. Philbert; but he had already quitted the place: at last, a fresh counter-march brought me upon his army, and I began the action with my marksmen; but Charette took advantage of the protection of la Boulogne, which separated us, and fled again, with my cavalry at his heels. I was preparing to follow him, when an order from the Minister (27), enjoined me to send off imme-

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(27) Every thing seemed to conspire to destroy my means and shackle my operations. At the moment the Minister deprived me of 5000 men from the division of the North, two resolutions of the Committee of Public Safety ordered me, the one to send 1200 men to Rochefort, where they were to be embarked, the other, to keep 2000 regular troops in garrison at la Rochelle. La Rochelle is secured from surprise, and only wants for its defence a few companies of gunners and citizens of the national guard, moreover, in twenty-four hours, I could assemble there 12 or 15,000 men it is true, that, in order to replace these forces, the Minister informed me he had sent 3000 cavalry, but the greatest part of them did not arrive till Germinal, and there were

diately 5000 men for the army of the coasts of Brest, and to detach them from the division of the North, which formed the greatest part of the corps of the army which I then commanded in person. This ill-timed order ruined me; but I was obliged to obey. I left Cordellier upon the borders of Boulogne, to observe the movements of Charette, and ordered him not to risk an action till I sent fresh forces into le Bocage, in order to second him.

During these circumstances, General Huché, who commanded at Chollet, where there was a strong garrison, sent out daily large detachments, which made successful incursions in the neighbourhood of Bernard de Marigny. I had some troops to dispose of by the evacuation of several of the central posts, such as les Herbiers, Chantonay, le Roche-sur-Yon, which I had gained possession of. Finally, the Representatives of the People with the army of the West, took two resolutions which I had long since solicited, and

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were scarcely 800 of them fit for service; the rest wanted horses, accoutrements, or arms. They thought to increase my strength by sending me 30,000 men of the first requisition, destined to fill up the complements of the army. There was not one of them armed, or who had shoes. It was said that I commanded 80,000 men in the West; but they did not say that half of them were unfit for service.

which would accelerate the termination of the war as much as all the military operations. One of them ordered Chollet to be evacuated; the other, that all the inhabitants of la Vendée should quit the country; if not, that they should be reputed as rebels, and treated as such. This new disposition gave still greater activity to the operations, by augmenting the number of troops acting offensively. Charette being soon pursued, and pressed upon by three columns, was overtaken and defeated by that commanded by General Haxo, who on that day lost his life. On the other side, Stofflet, after having defeated General Grignon, was, in turn, twice vanquished by the latter.

The rebels being continually harassed, and pursued into the centre of la Vendée, sought some points of support upon different parts of the borders of the Loire: I drove them from Liré, Châlonne, and Mont-Dejean, which they occupied; I did not allow them time to unite nor to form numerous assemblies, and they endeavoured only to escape and to avoid the columns. They soon hid themselves in the woods, and endeavoured to form establishments there, particularly hospitals for their sick and wounded. I scoured the forests of Toufou, Mondebert, Lépo, Princé, Roche-Serviere, Vezins, &c. &c. and there new establishments

blishments were no sooner formed than destroyed. We found in these retreats some armed detachments, monks, religious persons, church ornaments, a small quantity of warlike stores, and a considerable quantity of provisions buried under ground.

But without giving any farther details concerning my various operations in the months of Pluviôse and Ventôse, I shall relate a fact that will suffice to prove the distressed state to which I had reduced the rebels. By chance, the Chevalier de la Cathelinière, first Lieutenant to Charette, fell into my hands. He said to one of my Aides-de-Camp, who had him in custody, whilst waiting to be carried before the military tribunal: "The measures adopted by your "General have reduced us to the last extre- "mity; my party is lost without resource. M. "de Charette wished not to carry on the war "this winter; and, if time had been allowed us "to recover ourselves, we should have had fifty "thousand men (28) in the spring, proof against "every kind of danger, fatigue and distress. "We want warlike stores; and the destruction

(28) It must be observed that Cathelinière speaks here only of the forces of Charette. I knew that the rebels were still very numerous, but they were in want of warlike stores.

"of

" of our mills and ovens will deprive us of our " remaining succours in provisions," &c.

La Cathelinière made the same declaration before four Representatives of the People, then on mission with the army of the West, Garrau, Prieur, Hentz, and Francastel.

In comparing this declaration with every thing related by d'Elbée concerning the situation of la Vendée, and in following the events which justified it, every impartial reader will be able to appreciate the measures taken by me in order to terminate this unhappy war, the most terrible of all the scourges which have afflicted the Republic. He can judge of the many obstacles I had to surmount, in order to arrive at the complete execution of a plan, which the constant opposition of so many various and contrary interests might cause to miscarry.

Whilst all parts of the army of the West were in the greatest activity; whilst the operations upon the left bank succeeded each other with such rapidity that the rebels had not time to recollect themselves; whilst the cantonments upon the right bank confined the Chouans, and rendered all the communications free and secure, particularly the high roads of Nantes, Angers, Saumur, &c.; I prepared a new expedition, a general attack upon le Marais. Charette, who suspected

it, attempted a final effort, and united all his strength against Challans. The action was long and very brisk. General Dutruy, who commanded in this part, compelled Charette to return into le Bocage, after having left a great number of dead under the walls of the town.

Two strong columns crossing upon the frontiers of le Bocage and le Marais, that is to say, in the environs of Roche-Servière, Legé, and Freligné, prevented Charette from discovering any of his motions, and from coming to disturb the troops destined for the projected expedition. I caused le Marais to be attacked (29) at all points; and after having experienced and overcome a resistance, and obstacles which the constancy and valour of the Republican soldiers alone could surmount, they forced their way into the centre of the country, seized upon Périer (30), and established themselves there in force. This operation was long, and le Marais was not entirely purged when I quitted the army.

We had attained such a degree of superiority in the West, and the Vendeans were reduced to

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(29) At the beginning of Germinal; it was impossible to attack it in the winter.

(30) Le Périer is a very large borough, situated in the plain in the centre of le Marais.

such a state of weakness, that it might be said it was no longer necessary to fight in order to finish the War; and although at this time (in Germinal) the Adjudant-General Dusirat suffered himself to be beaten in the environs of Mont-Glône by Stofflet and Marigny, upon whom he nevertheless took revenge, the interior of la Vendée no longer affording an asylum to the rebels, attacked at once by all the scourges which their fury and their crimes had provoked, the only measure to be employed in order to complete their destruction was, to confine them within the desolated circle, where a cruel epidemical disease (31), the want of subsistance, and the avenging steel of the Republicans, left them nothing but the choice of death.

Had I not learned the desperate situation of the rebels by the reports of a great number of prisoners, who all agreed concerning it, the last enterprises of their Chiefs (32) would have been suffi-

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(31) The banditti were attacked with a kind of leprosy, arising from an inveterate itch, which caused a great number of them to perish; and the more so, as they had no asylum where their sick and wounded could be taken care of

(32) Stofflet, at this time, obliged the women who followed his army, and who fought with an inconceivable and cruel obstinacy, to dress themselves in men's clothes—and yet they have been surprised that women were killed in la Vendée.

cient to convince me of the weakness of their remaining resources. Stofflet and Marigny being united, attacked la Chataigneraye; the adjudant Lapierre who commanded there had only 1200 infantry and 100 cavalry; he nevertheless repulsed them: being informed that he was to be attacked again in a few days, I reinforced him with 600 infantry and 120 horses. The rebels presented themselves in far greater numbers than at first, and after a pretty long and very warm action, they were broken and put to flight, leaving upon the field of battle a heap of killed and wounded, and four flags.

It was then that I thought the war sufficiently advanced and the circumstances favourable for commencing the execution of the sixth and last part of my general plan, the establishment of intrenched camps. I shall give an account of the principal motives which determined me to adopt this measure, without which the war may perhaps be checked, but can never be terminated, nor can a fresh insurrection in Poitou be prevented.

However impetuous and bold might be the general mode of attack and fighting observed by the rebels, they have been observed during the war to miscarry almost always before the fortified posts, however weak might be their fortifications. Thus, whilst our various corps of the

army

army of the West were by turns harrassed by these impetuous hordes, whose shock was still more violent by their impetuosity than even by their density, you might see these masses break, and, in a manner dissolve before a town surrounded by a simple wall, before the smallest lines, and before the smallest intrenchments: the sieges of Sables, Granville, Angers, &c. and particularly that of Nantes, are incontestable proofs of it.

However important the possession of Mont-Glône (St. Florent) might have been to them, they never dared to attack it whilst I commanded there; although the only fortifications of this post were a shallow ditch and a parapet badly flanked by some weak redans very distant from each other.

I have observed that the fire of the rebels was always very brisk and destructive, but not well supported. They would begin a battle with five or six cartridges. Many were obliged to substitute pikes for muskets for want of ammunition(33); and it is known that the attack of a fortified point requires a fire of musketry well supported, particularly when there is no artillery.

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(33) I was confirmed in this by all the prisoners.

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The camps also produced the advantage of accelerating the return of order and discipline in the army, which already began to appear in it by withdrawing our troops from the towns, where they are exposed to every species of corruption, and by accustoming the soldiers, particularly the new levies which the necessity of completing the corps caused to be sent by crowds into the West, to intrench, barricade and accustom themselves to the service and regimen of camps.

The intrenched camps enabled us, to the prejudice of the rebels, to make use of the greatest part of the means of defence presented to us by the nature of the ground in la Vendée, and the labours of their own industry, means from which they had derived so many advantages.

But the most powerful of all my motives for determining upon a system of encampment in the West was, to preserve to the Republic, if not the whole, at least the greatest part, of the rich productions which the crops already promised; to afford security and protection to the husbandmen, whom the wishes of government or the horrors of war had removed from its theatre, and who might be recalled upon every point of its circumference in proportion as the progressive and combined march of the camps towards the center of la Vendée should confine the circle and

secure

secure peace and tranquillity upon all its exterior parts; in fine, to substitute for destructive measures restorative means which might insensibly restore this purified country to its original prosperity.

Moreover, by establishing intrenched camps round about la Vendée, I did not give up the offensive system, the ascendancy we had acquired over the rebels promising us fresh successes. Two strong columns would incessantly have overrun the interior part of the revolted country. Their chiefs would have confined themselves particularly to prevent the reassembling of the enemy, or fighting them, or I should rather say, to destroying the parties of banditti who to the last moment attempted to unite again and to form themselves into bodies.

The general officer who would have had the command of an acting column, would have concerted with the commander of such, or such a camp, according as circumstances might have occasioned him to approach it. They would have communicated to each other their respective knowledge concerning the position, the force, and the motions of the different parties of rebels. They might, according to information obtained from positive reports, have agreed upon some partial operation, have attempted some *coups de main*, some of those

sudden

sudden expeditions which sometimes the most trifling event gives an opportunity to attempt, which should be undertaken as soon as conceived, and which are almost always successful when secrecy and celerity concur in their execution; but even supposing that the acting columns had been suppressed and that I had confined myself to defensive plans, which, in other respects, according to the disposition, the organization of the camps, and the habitual service I prescribed in them for the troops, would never have been an absolute and determined defensive, but certainly an active defensive, a defensive of movements, supposing, I say, that if from the moment the camps should have been established, no ulterior success had been expected; in fine, the termination of the war, but from their advancing, their progress upon the enemy's territories without the concurrence of secondary measures, I still believe that the success was infallible, provided always that the general officers had not swerved from the circular instruction indicating the conduct they were to observe in the formation of the camps, in the interior and exterior service of the troops which composed them, in the just distribution of the different kinds of arms, in the direction and the activity given to the labours of the pioneers charged with clearing the country and opening

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the roads upon the points, and particularly upon the line which the camps were to pursue in changing their position, in securing by the same proceedings the communications between the camps forming the first line and the cantonments forming the second, &c. &c. and above all in submitting in these different dispositions to local circumstances, so imperious in la Vendée that it is necessary to abandon the customary means and sometimes to make a sacrifice of principles.

I have thought it useless to relate several other military events (34) which took place whilst I

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(34) There is nevertheless one of which I shall speak, and that is, the evacuation of Mortagne. I was on the march when the garrison of Mortagne, obliged to sustain a daily fire against the rebels that surrounded it, had exhausted its ammunition. The commander dispatched a messenger to me whom I never saw. It would have been much better to have sent him to Nantes, where the chief of the staff always resided. The garrison, not being able to hold out any longer, evacuated the town, forced their way through the enemy with fixed bayonets, and performed their retreat with order and courage. Some officers came to the popular society at Nantes, and there spoke against the general officers. They afterwards circulated a writing which they signed: this was a libel which might occasion the greatest mischief in the army. The Representatives of the People entered into a resolution in which they gave a brilliant proof of their confidence, and caused the authors and signers of this writing to be imprisoned.

commanded the forces in the West, as they are less interesting than those I have related, and would have contributed nothing to the information which this part of my work may give respecting the true situation of the rebels at the time the command was taken from me, that is to say, when the camps were establishing.

Mortagne was the only post remaining in the interior of la Vendée. I wished to evacuate it; the Representatives of the People opposed it, and they required me to retake it. We entered it again without firing a gun, and I left a strong garrison in it.

I ought to have been the less concerned respecting the fate of Mortagne, as general Cordellier was in the neighbourhood with his division, and ready to succour it. Moreover, this event, which has caused so much noise, was a very trivial affair, and could not be considered as a disgrace.

But if I cannot be reasonably reproached for the evacuation of Mortagne, military men, and men acquainted with the country, will find, that I did not take every advantage offered by the march of the twelve columns provided I had given them another direction. In fact, my first operation should have been to drive the enemy beyond le Layon, and to have defended the right bank of it, when the columns which had marched from the Ponts-de-Cé, Brissac, &c. becoming useless at those points would have strengthened the columns on the left; and I should have occupied less ground, &c. &c.; in fine, instead of marching the columns from East to West, their direction ought to have been from the South East to North West: in this respect I am inexcusable. I partook of the impatience of the Representatives

It would be equally useless to enlarge further upon the general dispositions which I was not able to execute: I believe the result of them would have proved fortunate; I may doubtless be deceived; and I shall very willingly submit to

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of the People, who, according to the orders of the Committee of Public Safety, gave me only a month to finish the war; and acting with precipitation in the measures taken for its termination was only prolonging it.

The former Committee of Public Safety gave plans to all their Generals in Chief: I never received any thing from it but threats to send me to the scaffold; and yet it has been said that I was a creature of the former Committee.

Few men are possessed of such a mild disposition as myself (for which I appeal to all who have known me); and yet I have been described as a Vandal, a cannibal, &c. &c.

No general officer has had in the army a more modest train than myself; yet M. Hector-le-Gros pretends that I had the pageantry of a Marshal of France, because he saw at my door *a centinel and a messenger on horseback.*

I was never intoxicated in my life, yet M. Lequinio, according to M. Gannel, pretends that I was inebriated when with the army: and this is M. Lequinio who reproaches me with drunkenness!

The Representatives of the People Hentz and Francastel, in the printed report of their mission in the West, speak of me as a proud and ignorant man. How shall I answer these reproaches? No person is more meek than myself; as to my military abilities, I agree that they are very weak, and I will not appeal from the judgment of the representatives Hentz and Francastel but let me be permitted to tell them,

reasons of experienced and impartial military men, who, being well acquainted with the country, shall demonstrate to me the errors of my plan and the insufficiency of the measures I adopted in order to terminate the War of la Vendée.

But if this work, which has no other merit than that of proving the paucity of the author's pretensions, his love for truth, and the independence of his opinions, should be attacked by men who are strangers to the profession, or by some who possess nothing military but their epaulettes; if, in the new productions which this may give birth to, malice and ignorance be added, and they endeavour to refute me by gross abuse and false reasoning, I most assuredly shall

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that in writing they often swerve from the truth, and that the greatest part of the events related by them are delivered in such a manner as does but little honour to their memory or integrity.

One word more and I have done. A stranger to all parties and factions, I have never asked or obtained any thing by intrigue. I have never intruded myself into any rank, and could only owe my advancement to my attachment to my profession, and to some actions which are not without glory. I have served my country like an honest man, and a loyal Republican, and I defy all my enemies to prove the contrary. I have been ten months in irons. but I know how to suffer.

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not answer them; but I shall not be convinced that my plan is good for nothing.

What is preferable to every military plan is, the project of finishing the War of la Vendée by gentle means: this measure does honour to the National Convention. It is time to stop the streams of blood which for these twenty months past have inundated this wretched country. The Commissioners charged with this important mission will doubtless know how to reconcile the measures which the public safety commands with those required by humanity. They will rightly judge that an excess of clemency will infallibly endanger the safety of the Republic.

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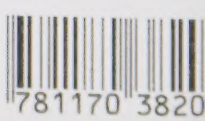

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